

**Being a Young Learner English Language Teacher in a Polish Primary School- Professional Self- Construction In a Climate Of a Reform**

Submitted by Elżbieta Sowa to the University of Exeter

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## **Abstract**

The study reported in the thesis sought to explore how semi- specialists TEYL teachers who have not received specialized TEYL training and did not graduate from public 3- years teachers' training colleges construct their professional sense of self or professional identity) within the context of educational reform in Poland which has led to the lowering of the start age of English instruction the last to the first grade of primary school, as well as to the introduction of new child-friendly pedagogic practices.

The study aimed to explore the following research questions:

- 1) What factors contribute to semi- specialists TEYL teachers' feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment in a context of educational reform in young learners' classroom
- 2) What strategies do semi-specialist TEYL teachers use to feel empowered?
- 3) In what ways does participation in the online platform for teachers professional development help teachers to feel empowered?

The data were obtained through face to face semi- structured interviews with 5 semi- specialists TEYL teachers who are currently employed in public primary schools.

The research conveyed the significance of macro (the politics of the Ministry of Education), meso (teachers' autonomy in a classroom and collaboration in a school community), micro factors (teachers' life histories). The teachers listed the following factors that shape their professional self in the context of the reform: teachers' initial experiences with TEYL, the status of TEYL as a profession, the politics of the Ministry of Education, capacity for autonomy in a classroom, collaboration with others, supportive relationships with others, the role of platform. Some of these factors like the initial experiences with TEYL, the status of TEYL as a profession and the politics of the Ministry of Education are disempowering for teachers' professional self, while others like supportive relationships and the role of platform are more empowering.

It seems that the realization of disempowerment or empowerment is at the classroom level (meso level) and influence teachers' autonomy in a classroom and relationships with other teachers in teachers' community.

The study deepens my understanding of construction of semi- specialists TEYL teachers in the context of the educational reform, namely what factors that exist in the context in which they work lead to their feelings of disempowerment, what strategies they employ to feel empowered and what is the role of the online platform to support teachers. I conclude this chapter by providing a list of recommendations for the Ministry of Education to support these teachers.

## Content

<b>Being a Young Learner English Language Teacher in a Polish Primary School- Professional Self- Construction In a Climate Of a Reform .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Introductory overview .....	7
1.2 Contextualising the study .....	7
1.2.1 TEYL in Poland and recent reforms .....	7
1.3 Rationale for the study .....	18
1.3.1 Statement of the problem.....	20
1.4 Aims and objective of the study.....	21
1.5 My personal interest in the study .....	22
1.6 Significance of the study .....	22
1.7 Organization of the study .....	25
<b>2. Literature review .....</b>	<b>27</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	27
2.2 Towards an understanding of professional identity .....	28
2.2.1 Identity construction and group membership .....	29
2.2.2 Post structuralist perspective on identity.....	32
2.3 Factors impacting on teachers' professional identity construction .....	36
2.3.1Macro factors- discourses of professionalism.....	36
2.3. 2 Meso factors – professional autonomy, collaboration between teachers .....	41
2.3.3 Micro factors- teachers' life histories .....	44
2.4 Identity in the study .....	44
2.5 Key studies on professionalism and teacher's professional identity .....	46
2.6 The Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study .....	54
2.7 summary .....	57
<b>3.Methodology.....</b>	<b>58</b>
3.1. Ontological and epistemological assumptions .....	58
3.2 Research design .....	63
3.2.1 The use of narrative interviews .....	64
3.3The research participants .....	66
3.4 Data collection procedures.....	70
3.5 Data analysis .....	72
3.6 Ethical considerations.....	73
3.7 Research quality .....	74

3.7.1 Credibility .....	74
3.7.2 Dependability .....	76
3.7.3 Transferability .....	76
3.8 Summary.....	77
<b>4. Findings .....</b>	<b>79</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	79
4.2 Factors that lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment/ empowerment .....	80
4.2.1 Macro factors- Poor channels of communication with the Ministry of Education ....	81
4.2.2 Meso factors- Poor channels of communication with the head teachers and other teachers from their community of practice .....	92
4.2.3 Micro factors- Low status of young learners English language teacher .....	97
4.3 Different strategies teachers use to feel empowered .....	100
4.3.1 Referring to role models.....	101
4.3.2 Seeking support from family members and colleagues .....	104
4.4 The role of the online program for teachers' professional development in helping teachers to feel empowered .....	107
4.4.1 Having access to knowledge on young learners methodology .....	107
4.4.2 Gaining critical skills .....	110
4.4.3 Recognizing importance of collaboration between teachers.....	112
4.5 Summary.....	115
<b>5. Discussion of findings .....</b>	<b>116</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	116
5.2 Factors that contribute to participants' professional identity.....	117
5.2.1 Teachers' initial experiences with TEYL – micro factors.....	117
5.2.2 The status of TEYL as a profession- macro factors .....	118
5.2.3 The politics of the Ministry of Education-macro factors.....	120
5.2.4 Capacity for autonomy in schools- meso factors.....	124
5.2.4 Collaboration with other teachers – meso factors .....	128
5.2.5 The significance of supportive relationships - micro factors.....	130
5.2.6 The role of the platform .....	131
5.3 Contribution to an understanding of teachers' professional self in the context of reform .....	135
5.4 Conclusions .....	139
<b>6 Implications, recommendations and conclusions .....</b>	<b>141</b>
6.1 Conclusions .....	141
6.2 Implications.....	143

6.3 Recommendations for the support of TEYL teachers.....	146
6.4 Recommendations for future studies.....	148
6.5 Final reflections.....	149
<b>Certificate of ethical research approval .....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Informed consent form.....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>Appendix 3 Informed consent form (Polish version) .....</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Appendix 4 Example of Initial Coding .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Appendix 5 Example of identification of emerging categories and sub- categories .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>172</b>

# **1.Introduction**

## **1.1 Introductory overview**

The study reported in this thesis is interested to examine the ways in which teachers of English to young learners (hereafter referred to as TEYL teachers) construct their professional sense of self (or professional identity) within the context of educational reform in Poland which has led to the lowering of the start age of English instruction the last to the first grade of primary school as well as to the introduction of new child-friendly pedagogic practices.

Following (Liu et al., 2011) among others the starting point for this study is a belief that teachers professional identity is not only a useful research lens to better understand TEYL teachers' perspectives, and professional actions but also to understand their experience of educational reforms. Moreover, as Ball (2003) highlights since reforms not only change what teachers do but also who they are and what it is possible for them to become, an examination of professional identity in the context of educational reform is an important way to understand the reform process itself. The introduction of TEYL to ever younger learners is a huge project worldwide that is impacting on the working lives of millions of teachers (Johnstone,2009). Yet to date very little is known about how teachers are affected by TEYL reforms, how they experience these and what their support needs are. Given this through my focus on professional identity construction among a group of TEYL teachers in Poland, it is hoped to raise awareness of some of the challenges and factors affecting teachers in the context of TEYL reform in Poland but also more broadly and the ways in which these might be addressed.

## **1.2 Contextualising the study**

### **1.2.1 TEYL in Poland and recent reforms**

The provision of English language instruction to young learners has a long history in Poland, and the government first made provision for children to learn English in 2005 when English was introduced to children in the fourth grade or

at the age of 10 for 2 hours per week (The system of education in Poland, 2005). However, in the past decade it has been both the focus of reform in its own right but also impacted by a broader reform of primary schooling in Poland. These things, to be discussed in more detail below, have had a considerable influence on TEYL teachers working lives.

The first of these reforms concerns the decision taken by the government to lower the age at which children embark on English language instruction. In 2008 the government announced a decision to lower the start age of English instruction to the first grade of primary school, which at the time meant the start age of instruction was seven years of age. Since then the introduction of English from grade 1 of primary school has gradually taken place with the vast majority of schools offering English from Grade 1 in 2014.

There are three reasons why the Ministry decided to introduce obligatory English language lessons to lower grades of all primary schools. Firstly, this can be seen to link to parental pressure (Pawlak, 2004). The rise in number of parents who wished their children to attend private tutorials for children has grown since Poland entered the European Union in 2004, and also reflects a strong belief in the importance of English to increase their children's job prospects as elsewhere ((Rich, 2014). By offering English from the early grades of state-run primary schooling, the Ministry of Education hoped that this decision would give equal opportunities to all children to have contact with this important form of cultural and linguistic capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially for those parents in small towns or villages who could not afford the cost of private language courses and course books.

Secondly, the decision of the Ministry to lower the age when children start to learn a foreign language was a response to the views of English language teachers of higher grades needs. They claimed that it is in lower grades of primary school children are able to gain motivation to learn a language. Pamuła (2006) for example, claimed that children who started learning English at lower grades of primary school are more enthusiastic and more willing to participate in more formal language lessons in higher grades. These views are echoed by many worldwide who believe that children have a special advantage in lan-



guage learning and this is one of the main reasons why there is a global trend for a lower start with English language learning (Pinter, 2011). The main long-term advantages are seen to be greater potential to develop native-like pronunciation (in higher exposure settings) and a positive attitude towards the English language and the cultures of English speaking countries, as well as better language proficiency (Rich, 2014). The Ministry of Education also studied examples of good practice of many European countries where they felt English language lessons had been successfully introduced with young learners. The Ministry hoped that by giving Polish children the same chances to learn English at the early it would maximize their chances in the future (Pamuła, 2006).

The objectives of English language education in the first three grades of primary school (Ministry of Education, 2008) are as follows:

- Create a positive first impression of learning English
- introduce children to an English speaking culture, increasing confidence in expressing themselves in English.

In the first 3 grades of primary school these outcomes and objectives are to be achieved within two 45 minute periods a week for children in grades 1-3. A typical English language classroom in the first three grades of primary school consist of 25-30 children. The children are not divided into groups based on proficiency level and one of the challenges teachers face is that classes contain children who began their learning of a foreign language in kindergartens and those who have not received this.

The second reform relates to the decision taken in a school year 2015/ 2016 to lower the start age of schooling from seven to six years of age in all state-run primary schools from the 2015/16 school year. To help facilitate the introduction of this new reform the Ministry of Education announced two years: 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 as years when parents could choose whether to enrol their children in the first grade of primary school or to send them pre-primary classes in kindergartens. However, not all schools have managed to open separate classrooms for 6 year old children to date, with many six year old children being placed in the same classes as seven year old children. In part, this is blamed on Ministry of Education, who it is claimed, did not make clear the exact date

by which the implementation of the reform must take place, meaning that schools did not prepare adequately for the reform. However, it also reflects the result of an effective campaign against the reform whose organisers claimed that many schools were not ready for 6 year old children who are seen to need more space for physical activities and who persuaded many parents to defer their decision to enrol their six year old children till the end of the summer holidays. The result is that many six year old pupils are being placed in the same classrooms as 7 year old pupils. This decision is also affecting English language teachers who not only need to address the fact that some children in their classes have had pre-exposure to English in kindergarten, but also accommodate the very different cognitive and social development needs of six and seven year old children. When cognitive development is taken into account, 6 year old children in contrast to 7 year old have unintentional and automatic attention (Santrock, 2004). It means, that they do not have problems with completing a task they are familiar with, however, when an activity is too complex and it requires coordination of many functions they have difficulties in completing it. It is also worth remembering that pupils at that age are distracted easily when other stimulus is more attractive (Santrock, 2004). Big differences between 6 and 7 year old children are visible in relation to social development. 6 year old children have problems with maintaining social contacts with their peers. As a pupil a child needs to learn such behaviour patterns that allow them to function properly in a group of peers. Sometimes it happens that 6 year old children act impulsively and do not respect other children's turn to perform.

The third dimension of the education reform process has been the recent requirement (the school year 2015/ 2016) that primary teachers adopt new creative methods of teaching and Assessment for Learning (AFL) practices. The decision by the Ministry to promote these things is informed by two independent reports that focused on identifying the reasons for what were seen to be inadequate English language learning outcomes for Polish school children. The first report which was conducted by PASE (Organization for quality in foreign language learning and teaching) showed that 80 % of Polish teachers teach in an ineffective way. They tend to focus on teaching grammar and completing exercises from course books. A second report was conducted by Muszyński (et al., 2014) on the effects of teaching English as a second language in primary

schools in Poland between 2011-2014 also indicated that the learning outcomes of English language lessons in Polish primary schools are not satisfactory due to teachers using methods of teaching that are not adjusted to the needs of children.

By careful analysis of the report the Ministry recommend implementation of creative methods of teaching as well as AFL into English language classrooms. Creative methods were ones which would adhere to the following assumptions about what makes good teaching practice:

1. The language lessons need to be adjusted to the needs of children who at this age have natural curiosity of the world and have strong willingness to learn new things. Therefore, teachers need to introduce activities that not only develop language skills but also whole development of children and to ensure strong coherence across different subject areas in the primary curriculum comprising, Polish language, mathematics, social sciences, music, art, PE, computer technology
2. The learning of young learners should be conducted in the target language based on the belief that this is necessary to maximise exposure to English (Moon, 2005). However, it should be mentioned that encouraging children to use target language in a classroom needs to be conducted in secure environment. The Ministry (2008) recommends that children in the first grade should be allowed the silent period where they only listen to the target language. Then they are encouraged to repeat routine phrases firstly in group then individually.
3. Teachers should make sure that experiences children gain during English language lessons are meaningful to learners. Khan (1991) mentioned that children learn more effectively when they interact with others, and are able to communicate with their peers in a foreign language. The task of a teacher is to create real tasks that are similar to the tasks that children will perform in real life.

With regard to AFL, introduction of this method of assessment would help pupils to become more aware of the learning process and their role in this (Rapport set by the Foundation for Development of the Education System: Assessment in Polish schools, 2014). The Polish version of AFL is based on the US

initiative called Keeping Learning On Track designed by the Educational Testing Service. This assumes that there are 5 elements to effective AFL as shown below.

- Informing pupils about aims of each lesson and providing them with criteria for success.
- Involving pupils in discussion, asking questions about a theme of a lesson.
- Involving pupils in self-assessment of the learning process, raising awareness of their strengths and weaknesses
- Learning with a partner, peer assessment pair and group work
- Acquiring the ability to learn effectively, to know effective way to gather knowledge from different sources (Stern, 2006).

The elements mentioned above are recommended to use in the everyday school practice. The graphic assessment that is a sun (very good), a sun with a cloud (good), and a cloud with lightening (your work needs to be improved) is recommended for lower primary classrooms since 1991 (Ministry of Education, 1991) and should be used once a month to assess language skills.

#### 1.2.2 The impact of the TEYL reforms on teacher recruitment and training

Not only is the introduction of TEYL arguably one of the world's biggest teaching reforms as Johnstone(2009) has argued, but it is also an area of TESOL that has grown very rapidly in the past decade (Copland et al 2014, Rich, 2014). In Poland, as elsewhere this has led to a shortfall of suitably qualified TEYL teachers and has led to a number of policy initiatives to both identify and prepare TEYL teachers.

Worldwide, as large transnational studies undertaken by Emery (2012) and Rixon (2013) have shown, there is considerable diversity in the sorts of teachers who are involved in TEYL. In some contexts responsibility for delivering English teaching in primary schools is assigned to generalist or homeroom teachers, but in many contexts because generalist teachers do not feel able to teach English, specialised English teachers many of whom have transferred from secondary schools are responsible for TEYL. In addition, in many parts of the world a

shortage of teachers means it is still not uncommon to recruit full or part time English speakers (both local and first language speakers) who are not qualified teachers (often referred to as semi-specialist teachers), even in countries where TEYL is well-established, such as in Europe (Enever, 2014). The situation in Poland is not dissimilar, and there is considerable variety in the sorts of English teachers working in Polish state-run primary schools:

- specialists of ELT, some of whom graduated from teachers training colleges for TEYL teachers and some are general ELT specialists in all age groups of English learners
- specialists of early- years education who need to take a language exam at B2 level
- Former Russian language teachers of higher primary and secondary school pupils who need to take a language exam at B2 level

A picture of TEYL teachers in Poland cannot be completed without a discussion on a complexity in ways in which TEYL teachers are trained. A recruitment practices show that head teachers do not regard all TEYL teachers in Polish state- run primary schools as high skilled professionals.

In Poland, there are two types of institutions with responsibility for ELT teacher training: public universities and private institutions with responsibility for teacher training. The major difference between universities and private institutions is that the former can issue PhD diplomas. These two institutions, however, are responsible for issuing BA and MA diplomas in ELT teacher training (Komorowska. 1994.) Public universities that are located in major cities in Poland have long tradition in ELT teacher training. In 1990s when Russian lost its status as the main language in higher primary and secondary schools there was a need to re-educate teachers to be ready to take up the position as ELT teacher in higher primary and secondary schools. In order to achieve this aim the public universities did the following steps. Firstly, they established 3- years teacher training BA diplomas for English language teachers and 2- years MA program for those teachers who wish to further their qualifications. Secondly, to ensure a good quality of language teacher education the English Philology departments and teacher training colleges increased the English entry requirements for the candidates. Only candidates with the highest score in English language tests

were admitted. What is more, the syllabus for 3- years teachers training colleges and 2- years MA program was modified and to include four components : 1) practical and pedagogical grammar, 2) history, culture and literature of English speaking countries, 3) psychology and educational sciences, 4) English language teaching methodology. A vital part of the syllabus was also student placement in higher primary and secondary schools. The students were placed at carefully chosen training schools where they had opportunity to learn from the professionals who have extensive experience in ELT methods of teaching (Komorowska, 1994).

Due to the need to recruit more EFL teachers and the limited capacity of the state universities to train these, from 2004 private teacher training institutions started to open 3- year teacher training programs and 2- years MA programs. The private teachers training institutes had to follow the same curricula as public ones and needed to gain accreditation from the Ministry of Education. Although tutors from public universities have raised their doubts about the standards of teaching in private high schools due to lower entry requirements, in general the majority of graduates from these institutions manage to find employment in a school of their choice.(Miodunka, 2017).

From the above it can be seen that Poland has a robust system of pre-service training for ELT teachers. However, this is not the case where preparation for work as a TEYL teacher is concerned, particularly given the reforms outlined earlier. Until recently, as in many contexts, little specialist provision was offered to prospective TEYL teachers. The reasons for this appear, as Cameron (2001) has argued to reflect the misconception that “TEYL is a straightforward process that can be undertaken by anyone with basic training in ELT, because the language taught to young learners to be simple” (Cameron, 2011). In Poland, as in many countries in Europe and elsewhere as Enever (2014) explains, this has meant that no specialist provision for TEYL teachers is typically offered in pre-service training. In Poland, this situation only started to change in 2012 when separate TEYL modules started to be introduced. The result of this situation is, as Aleksandrowicz- Pędich (et al., 2003) has argued, that only a very small percentage of newly qualified teachers are ready to look for work as TEYL teachers, contributing further to the shortage of teachers to meet the demand for

TEYL following the lowering of the start age of instruction. To resolve the shortage in suitable qualified teachers and as a stop-gap measure the Ministry announced that both graduates of Russian Philology and of general Early Years Education could become a TEYL teacher if they took a test which demonstrated that they had basic English proficiency (B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for language teaching).

More recently, (in 2012) the Ministry decided to create clear standards to be used in the recruitment of TEYL teachers and has produced a formal list of those who are deemed to be suitably qualified for TEYL. These are:

- Graduates of 3- years teacher training colleges (the route that started in 2004 and in 2012)
- Graduates of early years education who have obtained a language certificate at B2 level and have experience working with young children at a primary school
- Former Russian language teachers who after the language lost the status of the main language in primary and secondary sector were given a chance to find employment in primary and lower primary schools when they obtain a language certificate at B2 level.
- To help raise the standards of teaching at primary level the Ministry also modified the curricula for ELT student teachers who study at 3- year teacher training colleges and 2- years MA programs both public and private. It was decided that a student who graduates from 3- years teacher training colleges are ready to take a position as TEYL teachers in lower primary and higher primary schools (7-12 year old children). However, student teachers who wish to take a position as an ELT teacher at secondary level need to be bachelors graduates and apply for 2- years MA course. A graduate of either public or private 3- year teacher training colleges is expected to
- Have specialized knowledge on psychological and pedagogical theories concerning young learner development and education and implications for teaching context
- Know teaching methods appropriate for pre - and early school children

- Have a rich range of lexical and grammatical structures as well as knowledge of phonetics which allow using English at proficient level
- Use theoretical knowledge to design English language lessons
- Be able to evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching methods

What is more, the graduates of 3- year teacher training colleges are obliged to participate in 150 hours of student placement in lower primary and higher primary classrooms (University of Warsaw, curricula of the Early years English language learning, 2012).

The Ministry of Education hoped that by establishing a list of qualifications, TEYL teacher status will be regulated. Indeed, head teachers who wished to employ teachers who met the requirements set by the Ministry of Education gain certainty that teachers qualifications were checked and are according to the standards set by the Ministry (MEN, 2008).

The Ministry also established that teachers who were trained prior to the new standards and innovations to the teacher training curriculum introduced in 2012 were given 5 years to expand their English language proficiency (to C1 level) and their knowledge in methods of teaching for young learners. To support teachers in expanding their language proficiency and TEYL methods of teaching a number of public (local centres of teachers professional development) and private (PASE (Polish Association for Standards in language Education, British Council) institutions organize a one- year training. The aim of such training is to improve language skills and equip teachers with theoretical and practical principles of TEYL. The participation in training organized by public providers is free, in contrast private training require paying fee. However, TEYL teachers who decide to take part in training organized by private institutions can apply for the financial refund.

What is more, these institutions organize one day workshops and conferences for TEYL teachers. In the school year 2015/ 2016 TEYL teachers have a chance to participate in a number of workshops and conferences such as: Active methods of teaching for TEYL teachers, Pupils with ADHD and dyslexia in



young learners' classroom, CLIL in young learners' classroom, European Language Portfolio as a tool for supporting child's learning.

Introduction of the online platform for teachers professional development was one of the opportunities to expand TEYL teacher's knowledge of teaching methods, build TEYL teachers' confidence, and build cooperation between teachers.

The online platform is an experimental version prepared for 50 TEYL teachers from Warsaw and Lublin area by the Main Centre for Teachers Professional Development in Warsaw. The platform lasts one school year and is targeted to TEYL teachers who did not graduate from public 3- years teacher training colleges and have limited knowledge in TEYL.

There are several main themes that teachers realize throughout the school year : lowering obligatory school age and what this means for TEYL teachers, comparing different course books for young learners, classroom management, gifted pupils in young learners classroom, pupils assessment. During realization of the themes mentioned above teachers participate in the following online and offline activities:

- A Poster session: In here teachers from the same school work together on a given topic. They present the results of their work on the platform (offline).
- A group discussion: This activity proceeds a poster session. Teachers give presentation on a given topic, then they discuss it in a more detailed way (online)
- An online conference with an expert: Teachers are invited to participate in a conference with an expert. They are welcomed to ask questions and present their dilemmas.(online)
- Educational film/ article: Teachers are invited to present their opinions about the presented material. (online)

The different activities the teachers are involved in aim to help teachers to integrate the new knowledge and the assumptions of the educational reforms with their previous knowledge they gained during studies and previous workplaces.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

The reforms of TEYL, changes to the pre-service training of TEYL teachers, and the introduction of new standards and support mechanisms for TEYL teachers outline above are all signs that the Polish Ministry of Education is committed to developed quality TEYL provision. Nevertheless, on the ground the introduction of the different reforms and the recruitment and training picture for TEYL teachers remains messy, as described above, reforms have not only not been fully implemented in all schools but have followed one another in quick succession making things confusing for teachers, head teachers and for parents. Taken together, this is contributing to a number of challenges for teachers in the workplace that need to be acknowledged. As I will argue, these are particularly acute for a particular sector of the TEYL teacher workforce.

Komorowska who writes extensively about ELT Polish educational reforms states that TEYL are often viewed as of low status in Poland. This she argues, is because TEYL teachers are often unqualified and poorly trained (Komorowska, 2007) as is evident in their over-reliance on teacher-centred methods and textbook based teaching. For this reason, those who want to teach ELT will on the whole prefer to obtain a job as a higher status secondary school teacher. Komorowska (2007) blames teachers for their plight and for failing to work to develop themselves professionally, however, based on my own experience as someone who became a TEYL teacher after working as a generalist primary school teacher for some time, I feel that the reasons for this low status are much more to do with the working conditions and attitudes towards TEYL teachers by head teachers and others.

I was employed as a generalist teacher in a primary school from 1998 to 2004. In 2004, as the rumours said the Ministry of Polish Education were making plans to shift English language lessons into lower grades of primary schools, there was a need to train future English language teachers who were ready to take a position in young learners' classroom. They sent a message to all lower primary teachers who had at least the First Certificate in English certificate to expand their language qualifications to become TEYL teachers. As I met the requirements set by the Ministry I decided to respond to the call and undertook

to improve my qualifications by taking the Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English and subsequently I enrolled in a teacher training college for English language teachers. As the number of places in public 3-years teacher training colleges were limited, I chose a private teacher training college. After graduation, I found an employment as a TEYL teacher for lower grades at a primary school. What I noticed is that after being involved in teaching as a primary teacher for 10 years was a marked difference in the professional recognition shown me by the head teacher and other colleagues from my time as a generalist primary teacher (when I felt I had a good status) to my time as a TEYL teacher when I felt this was much lower.

From my own experience and through discussions with other TEYL teachers, I began to realise that this professional marginalization was particularly acute for what I have referred to above, following Enever (2014) as semi-specialist teachers, those who are not trained specialists in TEYL (such as generalist primary teachers such as myself, and those teachers who have migrated from secondary schools and other subject areas such as Russian language teaching), and who have almost always attended private teacher training institutions which I have discovered are often viewed as second-class training providers by a head teacher when recruiting teachers.

It is of course not surprising, that given that since 2012 specific TEYL teacher training modules and programmes are being offered, that head teachers will prefer to recruit these specialist teachers over semi or non-specialist teachers. However, as more of these specialist teachers graduates, semi-specialist teachers are increasingly seen as underqualified and are struggling to find jobs in larger cities. An additional problem is that there is often little faith in the quality of the teacher training provided by private teacher training institutions among head teachers in charge of recruitment.

All teachers who are employed as TEYL teacher in lower primary schools are required to have C1 level of proficiency, however, the head teachers claim that it is impossible for graduates of private institutions to reach this level, given that the entry requirements of some of these institutions are lower than B2 level (Pawlak, 2015). What is more, the former Russian language teachers have

problems with employment not only because of lower proficiency in English but a lack of knowledge on linguistics, culture and literature. The scepticism of the head teachers towards the graduates of Russian Philology is caused by a fact that according to recommendations set by Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics (Alatis, 1992) a graduate of teacher training college need to have proficiency in English language, but also a thorough knowledge on culture and literature of English speaking countries. These recommendations are also suggested by the European Policy in Education and Languages (Newby et al., 2007).

Secondly, graduates of private teacher training colleges lack knowledge on ELT methods of teaching. The Ministry of Education claim that teaching curricula of private and public colleges are the same and in some of them there teach the same tutors, however, the expectations towards the students of private teacher training colleges are regarded to be lower (Pawlak, 2015, Miodunka, 2017). Siek- Piskozub and Aleksandra Jankowska (2015) ask graduates of both public and private teacher training colleges about their knowledge on ELT methods of teaching. The results show that graduates of private universities do not have knowledge on suitable methods of teaching for various age groups. What is more, head teachers are convinced by the analysis conducted by Jagiellonian University in Cracow during the round table discussion on teaching foreign languages in Poland (Miodunka, 2017) which claims that smaller private 3- years teachers training colleges have problems with finding academic tutors who have vast experience in teaching young learners in public primary schools.

#### 1.3.1 Statement of the problem

On the basis of the above, it can be seen that, as in many other countries around the world, that the rush to lower start age of English instruction has been undertaken without sufficient attention to the development of a qualified TEYL workforce. While this is now starting to happen, this means that there are a wide range of teachers (specialist, semi-specialist and non-specialist involved in TEYL. Moreover, as Enever (2014) has noted, this situation is unlikely to change anytime soon. In Poland semi-specialist teachers are being positioned as less competent, and it seems likely that this will have a detrimental effect on

these teachers' attitudes and morale leaving them to experience the move into TEYL as effectively disempowering with knock-on consequences for the effective implementation of the reform itself. In addition, through no fault of their own, these teachers may not be fully competent and/or confident to deliver the reforms of TEYL teaching methods currently being promoted. In the interests of maximising the chance for success of the reforms as well as improving these teachers motivation and morale, the provision of professional development opportunities is important but these remain limited. When I was employed as the main teacher in a lower primary classroom I noticed many professional development opportunities from one day workshops, longer training courses to professional journals devoted to teachers from lower primary classrooms. TEYL teachers in my opinion cannot count on such professional development opportunities. To my knowledge professional development options are limited and require paying fee, which is not adjusted to the financial abilities of TEYL teachers. In addition, until the very recent development of the online platform, neither the Ministry nor the Main Centre of Teachers Professional Development provide the teachers like me opportunities to network with other like-minded teachers. I have also noticed quite sadly that teachers in other schools did not take any actions to improve this situation. Probably, they were afraid to state the opinions which do not comply with the views of other teachers, as a result they want to thrive.

#### **1.4 Aims and objective of the study**

I am interested in capturing the professional identity construction of semi-specialist TEYL teachers working in Polish primary schools, in the belief that listening to and addressing the experiences of these teachers is crucial to ensuring the success of the reform itself. I am interested to uncover whether they view this as a disempowering experience and what they see as the main causal factors for this. I am also interested to identify factors which can be seen as empowering, including the professional development opportunities provided by the online platform itself which can help in the identification of possible ways to better support these teachers going forward.

### **1.5 My personal interest in the study**

As explained earlier, my personal motivation for undertaking this study is borne out of my own experience as a semi-specialist teacher over a number of years. I found my migration to TEYL as profoundly disempowering, entailing as it did a loss of status, professional recognition and respect. I was surprised that so little is known about the experiences of this important sub-group within the wider group of TEYL teachers, both in Poland and more broadly. I believe that providing these teachers with a voice is important and this is one of the main purposes of my study. Quality professional development opportunities are known to be important to the success of reforms and that revealing semi-specialist teachers perspectives, as I do in this thesis, can provide valuable insights into what sorts of professional development opportunities they are engaged in and how far these are felt to be empowering.

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

What strikes me that there is a paucity of research on TEYL teacher professionalism. It should be noted that a need to investigate the issue of TEYL teacher professionalism is caused by a fact that there are certain issues that differ general English language teacher professionalism from TEYL teacher professionalism. In TEYL field in Polish reality one can observe distinction between trained and undertrained teachers. The trained teachers are those who graduated from public 3- years teachers training colleges and who started their program in 2012. In the opinion of the Ministry, those teachers have thorough knowledge on methods of teaching for young learners, have C1 proficiency in English language and extensive knowledge on linguistic, culture and literature of English-speaking culture.

The undertrained teachers are those who graduated from Russian Philology departments and were previously employed as Russian and language teachers, who graduated from private 3- year teacher training colleges and who started their program in 2004 or 2012. The reasons for regarding these teachers underqualified are as follows: lower language proficiency, poor knowledge on methods of teaching suitable for young learners which is a barrier in implemen-

tation of the subsequent steps of the educational reforms in young learners classroom.

The Ministry and the head teachers do not take into consideration that educational reforms in young learners classroom and in teacher education often lead to periods of uncertainty and instability as teachers are asked to redirect their practices and their values and beliefs about teaching. This is a case that the head teachers do not recognize teachers' previous experiences in teaching various age groups and often decide that their places should be taken by more qualified teachers.

The relationship between educational reforms and teachers work is an area that has attracted considerable interest in recent years, both in mainstream education (see for example Ball 2003) and in TESOL as well (e.g. Wedell et al., 2013). This interest reflects a growing appreciation that the success of a reform is in no small part dependent on the extent to which teachers embrace and engage with this. In particular, there is an appreciation of the importance of understanding teachers' experience and feelings about a reform as an important step to identifying ways to support them with this.

Exploring this through a professional identity lens is increasingly seen as a valuable research focus (eg Liu et al., 2010). This is because reforms typically usher in a period of uncertainty and instability for teachers causing them to re-evaluate what they know, value and believe with important consequences for their professional sense of self (Overton, 2006; Castaneda, 2011) which will in turn impact on their classroom practice (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston 2005).

The particular focus of the study reported in this thesis is on understanding the relationship between educational reform and the professional identity among a semi – specialists TEYL teachers in Poland, where I live and work.

While in the field of TESOL there has been some research undertaken into the impact of reform on teachers from a professional identity perspective (see Liu et al., 2010, Tsui, 2007), I am not aware of any research which has examined TEYL teachers professional identity both in general and in Poland more specifi-

cally. Given that as Johnstone (2009) has noted, the lowering the start age of instruction is arguably currently the world's biggest educational policy reform, this is surprising. In addition, given that the rapid expansion of English into primary schools, as in Poland, has led to huge diversity in the sorts of teachers that are recruited to teach English in primary schools with different prior experiences and different qualifications, it would seem to be important to examine TEYL teachers professional identities as a way of critically appraising the ways in which they engage with the reform and identifying their support needs.

I think that understanding hybrid and contested nature of TEYL teachers' professional identity is important not only in Polish context as the educational reforms impact TEYL teachers worldwide. Indeed a number of "world largest educational reforms" have been introduced in TEYL field which largely impacted professional lives and TEYL teachers (Johnstone, 2009). Firstly, there has been wide movement to lower the age when children start to learn English and to introduce methods of teaching that are in accordance with development of children. These reforms aimed to have long- term benefits such as better language proficiency, native- like pronunciation and a positive attitude towards the English language and the cultures of English speaking countries, which means that children will further their jobs prospects in a global marketplace (Rich, 2014). Secondly, there has been a worldwide movement to introduce more robust standards for TEYL teachers. A TEYL teacher needs to have "fluency in age appropriate variants of language" (Widlok et al., 2010, p. 10) which is understood to mean B2 level of English as defined by CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe 2001). At the same time, there is an increasing number of private language schools as well as private primary schools that require C1 Level of English and the Cambridge English Language Young Learner Teacher Certificate (CELTA YL) issued by the UK based Cambridge Examination Syndicate.

What is more, a TEYL teacher must possess " a strong understanding of children's social and cognitive development as well as a good understanding of theories of second language acquisition in order to teach effectively" ( Pinter, 2006,p. 225). Pinter (2006) also added that extensive knowledge of the Piagetian framework of child development which can inform teachers of the needs and capabilities of children in various age groups is needed.



In line with this growing appreciation of the need for professional standards for the field, there is a growing effort to introduce specialist pre-service provision targeted specifically at TEYL teachers in a number of countries, such as for example in Croatia (Dagarin et al, 2007). The graduates of such programs have not only high proficiency in English, but also solid knowledge in methods of teaching for young learners, which means that head teachers wanted to employ them. This meant that teachers who did not graduate from these special teacher training colleges were regarded as unqualified and therefore had fewer chances to gain employment especially in schools located in big cities. Previous research conducted by Rixon (2015) suggested that as majority of Central European and Eastern European countries still employ teachers who graduated from Russian Philology (Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia), graduates of teachers training colleges who train teachers for all age groups from pre- schools to adulthood, which means that only few hours were devoted to teaching young learners. The report conducted by Rixon (2015) also shows that majority of governments fail to provide teachers who did not have young learners' modules during initial training with continuous professional development. My thesis hopes to raise awareness of researchers and practitioners of the need to be involved in a worldwide debate on the professional careers of TEYL teachers. This debate aims to raise awareness of researchers, teacher educators and the Ministry of Education in various contexts about the need to introduce various support mechanisms whose aim is to empower teachers.

### **1.7 Organization of the study**

The thesis is organized in a following way. The introductory chapter has provided the rationale, and aims of the studies as well as the analysis of the educational reform in YL classroom. Chapter 2 presents the way of understanding the professional status of TEYL teachers through the lens of professionalism and professional identity. Chapter 3 contains a description of the research design, and procedures of data collection. The chapter also explains how the data were analysed. In Chapter 4 I present the findings and relate them to the conceptual framework that was introduced in the chapter three. The discussion of the findings in relation to the literature on the theme is in chapter 5. The thesis con-

cludes with study limitations and implications of the findings for other English language teachers for young learners and those who are actively involved in reforming young learners classroom.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

As explained in chapter 1, the central focus of the study is to examine what semi-specialist TEYL teachers in Poland who are regarded as underqualified by the Ministry and the head teachers due to low proficiency in English and limited professional knowledge on methods of teaching used in young learners' classroom see as the main factors contributing to their disempowerment and empowerment.

Since the study seeks to identify these things by examining teachers' professional identity, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce my conceptual understanding of teachers' professional identity and factors influencing this which can lead to teachers feeling more or less empowered during an era of reform. To develop my conceptualization of professional identity I first undertake a critical review of different positions that are present in the literature on professional identity and explain how a primarily post-structural understanding of teachers' professional identity construction, one which acknowledges the importance of taking into consideration the ways in which power and agency inform the process, has informed my own stance on this. I draw upon positioning theory to describe the ways in which teachers construct their professional identity in the context of educational reforms, suggesting that professional identity construction and the reform process are linked in two ways. Firstly at a time of educational change, teachers professional identity construction process is informed (and potentially transformed) by the reform itself (whether positively or negatively). Secondly, professional identity construction on the part of teachers also exerts an influence on the reform and as such the ways in which teachers elect to position themselves in relation to the reform and the coping strategies they adopt can work to further the reform or potentially derail it. Following on from this drawing on a framework developed by Opfer (et al., 2011) I identify a range of diverse factors informing teachers' professional identity construction that include: macro level factors(wider discourses on professionalism), meso level factors (school and community factors), and, micro level factors (such as teachers' own dispositions and attitudes borne out of their prior experiences and life his-

ories). Informed by Opfer's and Pedder's work (2011), I argue that these factors work in interplay in the construction of professional identity and in the creation of feelings of disempowerment and empowerment in teachers and I suggest that when there is a big gap between beliefs, practices, knowledge, and experience then the students or teachers have problems with assimilation of new knowledge, and thereby with their engagement with the reform itself. The chapter then goes on to examine a number of studies which have examined teacher professional identity during reforms. and through this to highlight some important macro, meso and micro dimensions of identity construction that can inform my own research inquiry and which have helped shape my research methodology and choice of methods in my own study. Based on all of the above, the chapter concludes with an explicit account of my theoretical framework and the research questions that my study seeks to address.

## **2.2 Towards an understanding of professional identity**

The concept of teachers' professional identity has attracted considerable attention within social sciences in the past two decades (Akkerman et al., 2011).

In the early 1990s it attracted interest as a way to explore why teachers choose teaching profession or their motives for taking a teacher position. Morgan, Johnston and Johnston (2005) claim that by exploring teacher's identity we can also better understand teachers professional life and how their identity is formed, what different roles they play, the people who are important in their professional life, and the challenges they face. It is claimed that an exploration of professional identity can help understand teacher commitment to their work, providing insights into their "adherence to professional norms, whether and how they seek out professional development opportunities and what obligations they see as intrinsic to their role" (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 383-384). These things are all of interest in my own study of TEYL teachers' encounter with recent educational reforms in Poland and its interest in better understanding how to support teachers with these and, as such, have led me to identify professional identity as a critical lens through which to examine these.

Analysis of the literature on teachers' professional identity shows that the term itself is contested. For example, a review of 22 studies conducted into teacher identity by Beijaard (et al., 2004) shows that the concept of identity is understood differently by researchers. The understanding of the term identity depends on the research angles and the discipline a researcher uses (Gee, 2000). It is therefore important to clearly explain my own understanding of the term that has underpinned my study. As I will elaborate on below, the study reported in this thesis adopts a socially constructionist perspective on identity which broadly speaking sees identity as a dynamic and constantly evolving phenomenon in the context of an individuals' engagement with others in social world. Broadly speaking, as I will elaborate below, there are two main ways of theorizing identity as socially constructed; identity constructed by our membership of different groups and theories that take a post-structuralist approach to identity construction.

#### 2.2.1 Identity construction and group membership

One of the most influential ways to theorize identity construction is to see this as resulting from our membership of different social groupings or structures (such as nationality, gender and ethnicity) One of the earliest theoretical perspectives which sought to create the case for identity as socially constructed was Social Identity theory which in contrast to earlier psychologically-oriented mentalist approaches to identity construction described identity as a form of social categorization (such as by Tajfel, 1978). Today, among those who stress identity as a form of group membership, interest is focused much more on the process through which people gain membership of social groups, and the interest is also on smaller social groupings such as professional or familial groupings. One of the most influential theoretical perspectives being the communities of practice perspective developed by Lave (et al.,1991) which sees identity, alongside group norms and values as something that is acquired from a process of socialization into these social groupings.

Drawing upon Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Lave et al., (1991), argued that learning is not an isolated cognitive phenomenon, but is as a process of socialization into communities of practice, group norms and values and as such the

outcomes of learning are not purely an increase in abstract knowledge, but knowledge of social practices (comprising group norms and values) that enable them to function successfully in social worlds. Etienne Wenger (1998) in particular stresses that this process is one that also leads to new forms of identity. Wenger listed five important characteristics of identity as socially constructed:

- It is an outcome of experience in the world
- It is a feature of community membership
- It evolves as part of an individual's learning trajectory.
- It results from a nexus of multi group membership.
- It is relationship between the local and the global and we define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses ( based on Wenger, 1998, p. 149).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) interest is in describing the process through which individuals gain community membership, and in doing this, they envisaged communities as comprising novice members (recognized by the community as legitimate peripheral participants in the community), expert members, and successful group membership as entailing an inward trajectory from novice to expert, entailing processes of belonging, engagement and alignment (1991). Wenger adopted a theoretical framework that examines identity from the perspective of membership in a given community. Identity is "an interplay between the social, historical and cultural a person faces as a member of a given community" (Wenger, 1998, p. 47). He also claims that identity of a given person cannot be regarded as a separate unit, but rather a connection between the personal and social. When an individual starts to be a member of a given community he/ she chooses various form of participation, non-participation and interaction. In the process of interaction a person gain awareness of who they are and what others think of them and their practice (Wenger, 1998). In this process teachers learn to understand different experiences they encountered in their professional careers to negotiate their self (Wenger, 1998). Wenger listed several ways of participation in a community of practice: belonging, engagement, and alignment.

The belonging to a given teachers' community plays pivotal role in the process of identity construction. A person can be a member of different communities of practice. As a member a teacher interacts with various people : other teachers, administrative staff, local educational authorities who impact professional identity. Choosing teaching I regarded as a first step in the process of belonging to a teacher community. Whether a teacher chooses teaching depends from past experiences they had during life (Malderez et al., 2007).

In the engagement a teacher who enters the teaching profession is asked to negotiate the meaning of the structures, conceptions and norms that exist in a given community (Malderez et al., 2007). From the first day teachers need to be provided with an opportunity to negotiate the meaning with other members. In this way they also learn how to negotiate their position in a community. There are different kinds of engagement in a teacher community from more informal to more formal meetings. Through engagement in different communities the members can create a common enterprise where they can share different meanings and symbols (Malderez et al., 2007).

In alignment process teachers interact and engage not only in temporary communities but also in global communities. The role of teachers is to "coordinate energy to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises" (Wenger, 1998, p.174). Professional alignment with others teachers comprises of different activities: sharing materials, discussing different methodological topics (Clarke, 2008). These professional networks teachers are encountered with play major role in "learning to teach" (Clarke, 2008, p. 84), but also in the process of constructing professional identity. This led to teacher growth and development (Clarke, 2008).

In this thesis, I view these ideas as helpful in explaining how in the context of the reforms to primary schooling in Poland that the professional identity of the particular TEYL teachers that form the focus of my study will be influenced by their socialization into the school communities in which they work and potentially transformed by the support offered by the online professional development community set up by the Ministry of Education. As such, I discuss the concepts

of recognition, belonging, engagement and alignment in more detail in section 2.3.2 below.

Although Wenger's understanding of identity as closely linked to community membership is valuable, it is also one that prioritizes an emphasis on the role of community in the construction of identity and "leaves little room for agency" (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p. 71). As Coldron & Smith (1999) argue, there is a need to recognize that individuals' can for example elect to engage with or contest community norms, drawing upon their experiences of other group affiliations. While Wenger suggests that identity as a nexus of multi-group membership, he neglects to theorize how individuals as actively engaged in constructing their identity.

Another problem with Wenger's perspective on identity construction is a lack of attention to the negotiated nature of identity construction, both in terms of the need to theorize a role for individual agency but also with respect to the influence of wider societal norms on values on which forms of group membership are given greater status and how these inform the sorts of identity positions an individual can adopt (Barton et al., 2005). In other words, by concentrating an account of identity construction on small group or community membership, the important impact of individual agency and wider discourses of power in society on identity construction are downplayed. For those who adopt post structuralist perspectives on identity construction these are critical considerations to consider in developing a fuller understanding of identity as socially constructed.

### 2.2.2 Post structuralist perspective on identity

A second perspective on identity construction, one that is often labelled as a post structuralist position is one that stresses the need to recognize and accommodate power into a process of identity construction which is best understood as a negotiated process (Block, 2007). From a post-structuralist perspective, there are competing understandings of what being a teacher means, some of which are seen as more powerful in ascribing or assigning a particular understanding of what it means to be a teacher than others. These views will be reflected in the relationships teachers have with others, and the ways in which



they are viewed in school settings, but a post structuralist understanding of identity also stresses the ways in which individuals life history particularly their previous experience of teaching and learning will help shape teachers' below, identity can be experienced as a 'site of struggle' (Norton, 2006).

The scholars who take a post-structuralist view of identity construction see identity as formed in "the shifting space where narratives of subjectivity meet narratives of culture"(Zembylas, 2003, p. 221). In other words, they seek to examine the influence of wider norms and values and individuals own understandings of themselves in the construction of identity and in doing so are interested to explore the role of power both in terms of acknowledging macro political forces in society (Sfard et al., 2005) and the micro political dimensions of identity construction in our interactions with others. Regarding micro political aspects of identity construction, these are seen to include the individuals own socially-constituted agentive efforts to be seen and heard and as such from a post-structuralist perspective, identity construction is a process of negotiation and can also be a site of tension and struggle. To quote Zembylas: "each of us struggles in the process coming to know, we struggle not as autonomous beings ...but as vulnerable social subjects who produce and are being produced by culture" (2003, p. 221). In what follows I will consider first the post structuralist stance on macro political dimensions of identity construction and then move to consider the micro political dimension of identity construction and the role of agency within this.

A number of different perspectives on the micro political nature of identity construction are drawn upon by those who adopt a poststructuralist stance on identity construction. These are ones that seek to uncover the process by which identity is shaped and negotiated with others at a local level. These highlight how while wider discourses frame interactions between people, that inform rather than determine the outcomes of these processes and as such highlight the role of individual agents in interpreting the meanings of these discursive realities in the ways in which they engage with and act with others. Among these, positioning theory originally developed by Harre (et al., 1999) and his colleagues is seen as helpful in explaining the role of discourses of power in the dynamic dialogic construction of self (Hermans, 2009). Drawing upon Austin's speech act

theory, Harre (et al., 1999) was interested to understand the role of power in individual interpretation of the meaning of utterances in conversations. He proposed the term positioning to describe “the discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines” (Harre et al., 1999, p. 97) and sought to describe different sorts of positions that operate in these storylines (or conversations). While Harre’s focus was on developing an understanding of individual positioning in conversational exchanges and therefore see discourse as referring to discrete linguistic entities, the conversational metaphor and the positioning theory developed by Harre has been seen as helpful in building an understanding of the ways in which people negotiate their identities with others within discursive realities which are understood, as explained above to be comprised of forms of knowledge and ideology rather than merely linguistic in nature (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). For these researchers, the term identity positioning is a way of conveying the ways in which power operates at a micro political level.

Harre (et al., 1999) distinguished between two dimensions of positioning in their theory; first and secondary positioning, and interactive and reflective positioning. First positioning refers to the position that others seek to impose on us and secondary positioning the position that we want to take up which may or may not be different from the one that others want us to adopt. In terms of the process of positioning, a distinction is drawn between the role of interaction in positioning and the role of individual reflection in positioning. Interactive positioning will lead an individual to recognize the position that we are expected to assume, whereas reflective positioning will lead to how we want to position ourselves vis a vis the position that others would like us to assume. Our ‘final’ position will be variable and will depend on how far it is possible to renegotiate the identity position (Harre et al., 1999). Thus, with respect to identity construction, the identity positions I assume are the outcome of our understanding of the possibilities offered us within wider societal discourses and the degree to which we elect to contest or challenge these understandings.

From the above, it can be seen that to embrace a concept of identity as negotiated and a possible site of struggle implies that individuals are active agents in

the process of identity construction and that they have the capacity to act. However, for post structuralists, agency is not free will, but is socially constructed meaning that the sorts of capacity individuals have is limited by the sociocultural reality within which they operate (Ahearn, 2001). As Giddens (1991) argues, for example, it is important to highlight that there is a relationship between agency and rules and resources and as such how this is affected by larger questions of social power (Pennycook, 1995, p.119). Thus while, individuals can elect to resist the ways they are positioned by others, in many cases they may lack the resources to do so or be constrained from doing so. Moreover, the ways in which they choose to contest will reflect in no small part the sorts of resources they have at their disposal.

These ideas are important for my own study into teachers professional identity as they highlight the ways in which the construction of professional identity among teachers will reflect a complex interplay between wider discourses of professionalism, and teaching in Polish society as well as those underpinning the reform on the one hand (which will position them in certain ways) and their own perspectives on the other hand (their own preferred positions). As was noted in chapter 1 above, it periods of reform are unstable times and are times when teachers professional sense of self are thrown into sharp relief. Teachers need to forge new forms of professional identity as a response to reforms. While reforms may be experienced as repressive, these also offer the opportunity for teachers to forge new forms of identity which result in professional growth. However, as Helsby (1999) notes, how teachers respond to reforms will depend on whether teachers feel their own sense of self is threatened or supported. Where this feels threatened, teachers may potentially resist changes brought on by reforms or feel disempowered but unable or unclear as to how to act. As crucial stakeholders in educational reforms, finding ways to help empower teachers to develop as professionals during periods of reform, such as by providing professional development opportunities, is therefore seen as crucial and can help ensure that teachers maintain or adopt positive professional identity positions regarding the reform (Day, 2002). Another thing that is seen as particularly important for positive professional identity construction in the context of reform is the extent to which teachers perceive they have a voice (Canagarajah, 1999) as without this teachers can often feel helpless and ignored.

In light of the above, in my the study into the professional identity of young learner teachers in Poland, it is important to consider the ways in which power is significant to both the sorts of professional identity positions that teachers feel able to construct and their agentic responses to the changes they are facing. It is therefore important to investigate teachers' professional identity construction and potential feelings of disempowerment as well as the extent to which teachers feel able to gain a voice and what sort of strategic actions they are taking to empower themselves.

### **2.3 Factors impacting on teachers' professional identity construction**

The adoption of a view of professional identity construction as socially constructed, as I have explained above, is the way I am approaching my inquiry into the professional identity of teachers in Poland. In doing this, I assume that the social worlds in which teachers live and work have an important impact, both positive or negative, on the sorts of professional identities they come to adopt. In light of this, in this section, I will describe different aspects of the social worlds which provide a frame of reference for teachers' identity construction process and the sorts of influences these can have. On the basis of my discussion of identity construction above, I have highlighted the importance of considering community, the individual and the wider power structures in an account of identity construction. That is, what are often referred to as in an account of macro, meso and micro dimension of social worlds (see for example Opfer et al., 2011). Informed by these perspectives I therefore understand identity construction to involve the complex interplay between these three dimensions and it follows from this that all of these dimensions are significant to a discussion of teachers professional identity construction. In this section I consider some of the key macro, meso and micro factors that are likely to be significant to teachers professional identity construction process.

#### **2.3.1 Macro factors- discourses of professionalism**

Discourses of ELT professionalism are widely viewed as exerting an important influence on ELT teachers professional identity construction. Vu (2016) claimed that ELT is a dynamic field which is subject to political and social relations.

These provide a backdrop against which teachers are judged or judge themselves to be professionals. As the ELT field has grown, attempts to introduce professional standards have also grown. The implementation of English language lessons into all educational sectors from kindergartens to language schools for adult learners has serious implications for ELT teachers. The increasing need for well qualified teachers and the need for acceptance of teaching standards create external pressures for ELT teachers to raise their professional status (Richards, 2008). However, there is still considerable debate as to whether the field can really be seen as a profession and whether teachers are treated professionally which has consequences for how the field is positioned in society and the sorts of status TESOL teachers are given.

As Richards (et al., 1994) explains, ELT professionalism might be classified as a semi profession as it only partially meets the criteria of specialist knowledge, status recognition and capability for self-regulation which are widely used to define professions. Firstly, the ELT field does not have sufficient recognition in academia, because it lacks a knowledge base, and qualifications standards are lower than of other teachers (Pennington et al., 2014). The poor professional status of ELT teachers is also impacted by the local social and political context. For example, Johnston (1997) who studied the professional status of ELT teachers in Poland mentioned that ELT teachers are regarded as second class professionals due to the low public image of general teachers in Poland. The way in which ELT is regarded as a profession is likely to impinge on teachers professional identity construction process.

However, changes to entry qualification levels for teachers, as with young learner teachers in Poland (see chapter 1 above) are evidence of the considerable efforts that the field has undertaken in “promoting practices, values and standards that improve how the field is perceived by others” (Pennington et al., 2014, p. 24). The status of ELT teachers can be raised by convincing public that ELT knowledge is solid and based on theoretical academics knowledge (Tsui, 2003) and by other standard setting mechanisms, such as the development of teachers competency frameworks. Johnston (2003) argues that as we shift towards a recognition of the need for teachers to have a solid pedagogical

knowledge base, this means that TESOL will no longer be “an occupation for anyone who can speak a language” (Johnston, 2003, p. 207). Such a shift will mean that the practice of recruiting first language speakers merely on the basis of their native speaker proficiency levels will no longer be seen as valid. However, to date, it remains the case that for teachers who are not speakers of English as a first language, their non-native speaker status continues to position them as less competent in many settings.

Other indicators of the growing efforts to professionalize the field include the increase in the number of TESOL organizations, professional journals, and magazines for teachers worldwide. The aim of these useful initiatives is to create opportunities for teachers to be members of wider community of teachers as well as to raise standards (Hasan, 2014). In Polish context there have been attempts to create community of English language teachers with shared goals, values and beliefs and to raise awareness of teachers to the importance of diversity, on-going inquiry, cooperation and respect which are seen as important activities in the efforts to professionalize the field (Richards, 1998; Edge, 1996). In the Polish context IATEFL Poland and PASE organizations were set up to help all English language teachers to share information and expand their theoretical and practical knowledge. What is more, two important journals for English language teachers were published; ‘Foreign Languages in Schools’ and ‘the Teacher’. These two journals focus on a wide range of issues affecting ELT teaching which can support teachers’ professional development.

These wider and competing tensions in EFL professionalism are the backdrop against which Polish teachers, including those who took part in my study, develop a sense of their professional identity. For many of the young learner teachers in my study who have not received specialized TEYL training as part of their pre-service provision, the attempts to standardize TEYL provision now taking place in Poland coupled with the wider low status still afforded teachers in Poland will quite possibly lead them to feel undermined as professionals with detrimental effects on the ways they engage with the educational reform processes.

Among those writing about professionalism, it is clear that the concept of professionalism is a contested area in education circles and increasingly among those who discuss professionalism in the field of ELT as well (see for example Leung, 2009). It is important to examine these perspectives as a way to understand and contextualize the sorts of issues arising for Polish teachers outlined above. As in general literature on professionalism also ELT professionalism can be examined from two perspectives. The first approach focuses on occupational characteristics of the ELT field, while the second examines teacher professionalism from a critical perspective (Vu, 2016)

Regarding to professionalism as occupational characteristics, these refer to the knowledge and competences needed to do a job effectively. In ELT the professionalism of ELT teachers as comprised of three main interconnected elements: language proficiency, language awareness and pedagogical content knowledge (Andrews, 2003). Richards (1998) lists the elements that help to build teaching competences and consequently professionalism in TESOL. Namely, a specialized knowledge base from academia, practical experiences, continuous attempts to improve and membership in professional community.

In contrast, the scholars who take the critical approach to teacher professionalism, situate their studies in the complexities of social power relations in schools (Vu, 2016). They not only list the norms and values needed for English language teachers to become respected and legitimate professionals but also critically assess the norms.

The critical approach to ELT professionalism proposes that a distinction is drawn between two dimensions of professionalism: sponsored professionalism and independent professionalism (Leung, 2009). Sponsored professionalism generally represents the views of the ministries of education, professional organizations, market demands (Richards, 2010) The requirements set by these external forces cannot be regarded as dilemma free. They impose on teachers new managerial style work, intensification of work, compulsory CPD which when they coincide with teachers' beliefs and previous experiences in teaching cause potential conflict in teachers professional life.

In contrast, independent professionalism is an antidote to sponsored professionalism. In here, teachers are asked to reflect on teaching practices, their own values and beliefs (Richards, et al., 1994). Leung (2009) suggested that every practitioner critically assesses assumptions and practices in reference to discipline based knowledge and wider social values and take actions when necessary. In this way, teachers are regarded as conscious decision makers and intellectual practitioners (Borg, 2003). The commitment teachers make to critically analyze sponsored professionalism is governed by a professional code promoted by sponsored professionalism and their professional consciousness, that is past and present experiences, communication with other teachers and parents (Campbell, 2003). It is claimed that every ELT teacher has a moral duty and responsibilities to critically examine his/her values and beliefs on teaching. In this way, teachers manage to reconcile their professional identity with the assumptions of educational reform and context in which their work. Only in this way they manage to raise their professional status as ELT teachers.

Thus, the literature on teacher professionalism shows that the notion of professionalism is multifaceted (Vu, 2016). It means that interplay of different actors (individuals, professional organizations), different dimensions (occupational and critical) have impact on the process of professionalization. Freidson (2001) assumed that professionalism is not a natural phenomenon, but it is seen as a consensus of different stakeholders who act together to acknowledge others. Because the professionalism of ELT teachers is shaped by different actors and different logic, teachers need to learn not only how to resist the tension they may bring but also how to negotiate the external forces to fit their teaching practice. Literature on teacher professionalism contains many examples of teachers' resilience with external forces (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnston, 2005). The literature on ELT professionalism also contains examples of such attempts. For example, Turner's study (2006) shows that teachers do not embrace the educational changes, but manage to successfully adapt the changes to their own teaching practice, their beliefs about teaching and students' needs. Similarly, Leung (2009) stresses the importance of autonomy and authority in dealing with external forces, but also the important role of external stakeholders who provide teachers with assistance on expanding professional knowledge. Leung's work is crucial in raising awareness of scholars that to raise teachers



professional status there is a need to combine professional knowledge, assistance of external stakeholders and teachers' values and beliefs.

The critical review of the literature concerning teacher professionalism demonstrates that our understanding of teacher professionalism should move from identifying essential knowledge, competences and skills needed for ELT teachers, to an essentially critical analysis of external forces that are likely to shape their professional practice. These external forces have also impact on teacher professional autonomy and authority. As a result, it can be said that professionalism is always critical. What is more, professionalism is regarded as a process where different actors and stakeholders play important role.

The professional status of English language teachers will be raised when the scholars focus on the examination of thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, practices, personal goals, emotions (Borg, 2003). In this way, the voice of English language teachers will be heard. Strike (et al.,1993) raised the same idea that a focus of researchers should not be placed on comparison to other professions, but instead on the role and importance of teachers; morale and commitment. In the thesis, I comply with a view of Johnston (2003) and Strike (et al., 1993) as the focus of my thesis is not to discuss whether TEYL professionalism is an established profession, but to examine how TEYL teachers see their professional career in the context of the educational reform.

### 2.3. 2 Meso factors – professional autonomy, collaboration between teachers

In terms of professional identity, my reading of the literature suggests that key meso level factors informing this are teachers' sense of professional autonomy and their sense of affiliation and legitimacy within the school community. Many scholars assume that professional autonomy is a key factor in teachers' willingness to engage in teaching and their adaptation to educational reform (Biesta, 2009). Even though professional autonomy is recognized as a key to effective teaching, still in many school settings teachers do not have autonomy in teaching as a result of neoliberal discourses associated with sponsored professionalism (Biesta, 2009). Teacher autonomy is generally linked to power whether teachers feel they are given a right to make decisions about their own

teaching in a classroom. Hoyle (et al., 1995) suggests that teachers wish to have freedom to decide what methods of teaching to use in their own classrooms. But he rightly asserted that full autonomy status is not possible. He mentioned the “conflict between the principal’s authority and teacher’s autonomy is an ever present possibility and can become acute in practice. Actual conflict is constrained partly by the structure of the school and partly by a widely accepted norm “(Hoyle et al., 1995, p. 14).

The conflict between teachers’ autonomy and principal’s authority is evident in Doyle’s work. According to him, “a degree of autonomy given to teachers depends on the level of control from principles, administrators and the bureaucracy” (Doyle, 1986, p. 97). Teachers’ autonomy is linked to teachers’ feeling of empowerment, their confidence and a sense of ownership. If the teachers do not see that the principals have a good will and do not give autonomy to teachers, they do not devote time and energy to teaching (Day, 2000).

It seems that teachers’ identity is partly formed as a result of membership in various teachers’ communities as discussed earlier in the chapter. According to Anderson (2008) teachers’ professional identity “will result from their experience of multi-membership and will involve reconciliation of one identity across many boundaries, influenced by their varying levels of commitment and participation within those communities (p. 87).

In general, teachers communities can be defined as socio cultural as socio-cultural contexts of situated learning (Lave et al., 1991) where members, in this case teachers, owing to the nature of their participation and acquiring knowledge by means of a social process: learn through practice (learning as doing), through meaning (learning as intentional), through community (learning as participating and being with others), and through identity (learning as changing who we are) rooted in the human need to feel a sense of belonging and of making a contribution to a community where experience and knowledge function as part of community property.

(Lieberman, 2008, p. 227).

Nowadays, it is common for ELT teachers to actively engage in different communities, each with its own unique cultures, values and roles expectations (Alfred, 2002, p. 9). What is more, each community has different views on the professional reality in which they operate (Zeera, 2001). It can be assumed that each community has an profound impact on teachers' professional identity. It is because a community influences who we are, our values, assumptions, beliefs, and practices' (p.9). Indeed, when a teacher enters a given community he/ she gains appropriate sociocultural knowledge and practices such as ways of speaking and behaving, conventions for representing ideas, procedures for communicating, modes of inquiry and verifying knowledge claims, and values and beliefs, which constitute the explicit as well as implicit features of community culture' (Zeera, 2001).

Therefore, attention must be given to distinct social culture of the community, the relationships between members and how it handles conflicting discourses (Trice et al., 1993). Indeed, as the literature shows, belonging in any teachers' community is involved in a de- construction and re- construction of self in order to make a space for creation of identity which is in accordance with the norms and values of teachers' community (Alfred, 2002, p. 7).

The process of de- construction and re- construction of teachers' identity in a context of membership in a given community is complex, because every teacher has different understanding of "rules of behaviour and correct practices" (Alfred, 2002, p. 6). However, in order to be accepted into a given community, teachers needs to accept the norms, values and behaviours or they can risk being banished from a community (Trice et al., 1993). Lave (et al.,1991) claims that while being a member of a given community a teacher needs to keep all the values, and beliefs about teaching that he/ she gained in childhood or in previous workplaces in a receptacle. Such view is echoed also by Miller (2009) who states that identity does not comprises of personal views and beliefs but is mainly influenced by contextual factors outside of the teachers themselves' (p.175) such as norms of the community and even differences between members.

In total, membership in a given community influences how individuals see themselves, and how they enact their profession in their settings' (Varghese, 2006, p.212). I comply to this view, as my thesis focuses on how affiliation in a given community lead to teacher's feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment.

### 2.3.3 Micro factors- teachers' life histories

Micro factors can be referred to as life histories that have impact on teacher's professional identity, as well as their attitudes and values borne out of their experiences. Guzman (2010) suggests that lived experiences teachers gained have impact on their identity. Interest in life histories has emerged recently as teachers are not regarded as simple technicians who need to learn and duplicate different teaching materials but as developers of teaching curricula and materials. Therefore, there is an increasing number of research that show interplay between language teachers' lives and perceptions of past and present events (Duff et al.,1997). The findings of research show that decisions teachers take in the classrooms depend not only on methods of teaching they learned during workshops but also on beliefs about teaching they learned during their professional career, studies and during childhood. The experiences teachers gained there impact their identity (Guzman, 2010). Teachers' identity is a unique amalgam of their perceptions of past and present experiences and social context (Duff et al., 1997). These issues impact teachers' identity both consciously and unconsciously.

In what follows I will consider my own understanding of professional identity that I bring to bear on my study and the significance of these factors to teachers identity construction process.

## 2.4 Identity in the study

Having reviewed relevant literature, it is important to consider my own understanding of professional identity that informs my study. As suggested earlier in the chapter, I see this as socially-constructed, and believe that while, following Wenger (1998), identity is undoubtedly informed by community norms and values informed by life and professional experience over time, it is important to

consider post structuralist perspectives as well especially since these provide insight into the significance of wider discursive aspects of social worlds and the significance of individual's life- history to the identity construction process. Rodgers et al., 2008, p. 733; Davey, 2013, p. 31) provide the audience with a definition that in my opinion clarify the understanding of the notion according to post- structural perspective to identity:

- Identity is both dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts which embody a variety of social , cultural , political and historical forces
- Identity is shifting, unstable and multifaceted, involving the ongoing re- construction of our stories over time.
- Identity is formed through relationships with others.
- Identity involves emotions.

This understanding of identity leads me to conclude the following with regard to semi-specialist TEYL teacher identity perspectives:

- Professional identity is multifaceted and evolves throughout teachers' professional careers.
- Teachers' professional identity is constructed in the process of negotiation between macro factors that exist in the context in which they work and live, and which exert considerable influence on the meso or community in which they work. The process of identity formation therefore depends on the "process of social construction that goes on throughout the life cycle" (Kelchtermans et al., 1994, p. 47).
- The professional identity is affected by a number of powerful macro discourses which can negatively impact teachers' professional practice (Ball, 2003, p. 54). Indeed, the TEYL teachers in Polish context work in a landscape which might be regarded as demanding and which positions semi-specialist teachers negatively due to lack of recognition of their professional qualifications and their lack of professional training.
- The professional identity is "personally and individually perceived" (Davey, 2013, p. 31). Each teacher has his or her own values and beliefs that are brought to bear on making sense of their experiences and these are often in contrast to and serve as a powerful discourses that ex-

ist in their context. Thus identity construction is viewed as a site of struggle, with individual teachers demonstrating different perspectives on how far they feel constrained and disempowered by certain discourses, and in the extent to which they are able to challenge feelings of disempowerment through the adoption of strategies which help teachers see themselves as potentially empowered. This piece of research helps to understand the dynamics of TEYL teachers' professional careers. They have to struggle to construct their professional identity in a time when educational reform creates a conflict between their personal self-image as a professional and the assigned professional identity that requires teachers to be followers of the assumptions of educational reforms (Davey, 2013).

The teachers, according to post structural perspective to identity, are not regarded as passive followers of the powerful discourses, but have agentive capacities to resist and challenge the demands (Buchanan, 2015). Each teacher needs to find a meeting point between their beliefs about teaching and the assumptions of educational reform, and in this way feel empowered. In keeping with this, I view communities of practice as offering certain interpretations of professional identity but that teachers may or may not choose to embrace these. Nonetheless, communities also offer opportunities for teachers to interact with others and this may be a powerful way for teachers to form new identities. While the relationships that are of utmost importance for the formation of teacher's identity are those with family members, colleagues from work (Palmer, 1998), in the postmodern era teacher's identity may also be influenced by interaction with the larger international community of teachers, made possible by advances in technology and globalization (Palmer, 1998). In addition, the process of identity formation depends on how we are seen in relation to others in teachers' community. It should be noted, that these social and relational experiences are regarded as useful tools that help teachers to create the identity (Cooper et al., 1996).

## **2.5 Key studies on professionalism and teacher's professional identity**

The aim of this section is to review the studies that focus on how teachers understand their professional self in the context of educational reform which is

assumed to impact on their professional identity construction. Educational reforms can be understood as social phenomenon that are external to teachers and which may well disturb their existing beliefs, attitudes and motivations to teach. That is to say, they may create change at the macro and meso levels (i.e. new discourses and new practices in schools) which are disruptive to teachers' personal orientations. Thus, the studies I sought to identify and report below are those which concentrate on teacher perspectives of different macro and meso level factors in relation to their own understanding of themselves as teachers, namely to their feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment. I also related to the studies that show how teachers use their agency in response to any tension that occurs between macro and micro factors in a society in which they work and live, and the role of different professional development opportunities in teachers' empowerment.

When the studies on different macro, meso and micro factors that shape teachers' professional identity and lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment/ empowerment are concerned, I found several studies: one in primary school context, one in general ELT context and two conducted in TEYL context.

One study which shows different factors that impact teachers' professional identity is conducted by Hayes (2012). He conducted a research on beneficial factors that influence the development of primary Irish teachers' professional identity. To find answers for the following research questions: 1) to what extent do beginning teachers see their teaching identities as having been formed by their biographies as students, their teacher education programs or their early career experiences?, 2) whether or to what extent beginning teachers see their development of teaching identities as the acquisition of competences?, 3) What do newly qualified teachers perceive as the dominant influences on their classroom practices during their probationary year? She conducted semi structured interviews with 10 teachers.

The data shows a number of biographical factors that impact their professional identity. Firstly, they identified childhood experiences (micro factors) that encourage them to choose teaching career, that is, family influence, teacher role models and friends. They also mentioned strong influence of students and their

parents from students' placement (meso factors). The final factor that emerged from the data was a school culture(meso factors) that in some cases was supported by principals and colleagues, but in other cases was not respectful, inclusive and democratic.

The value of this research is that it presents a successful model to teachers' empowerment that is used in Irish teachers' training colleges. The model is based on the understanding of factors that shape teachers' identity. This model is sensitive to understanding importance of teachers biography, their experiences as students prior to and during their pre-service teacher education. The teachers are asked to be involved in reflective process where they can compare their beliefs about teaching gained in childhood with the reality they observe in a classroom. This model pays attention to the importance of school culture. The focus is placed on successful cooperation with head teachers, mentors and other colleagues. Only in this way teachers gain opportunity for professional growth.

A second research that focuses on factors that influence the formation of ELT teachers' professional identity is conducted by Guzman (2010). Taking teachers' life histories as a source of data she hoped to find answers to the following research questions: 1) What sort of social and contextual influences have impact on the construction of language teachers' selves, 2) What is the role of agency and subjectivity in the construction of language teachers' selves?

The context of the study is situated in a time that a Mexican University decided to improve teaching quality of TESOL teachers to prepare for a major education reform in public primary school. However, the university leaders ignore the uniqueness of teachers' professional selves and the fact that the reform should be conducted by taking into consideration the factors that constitute identity.

The findings show that teachers' identity is a combination of the following factors: micro social factors ( learners, teachers, school leaders and colleagues), macro social (broader cultural, political, education ethos and the professional status), emotions, values and beliefs about teaching. The teachers' professional identity is an unique amalgam of these factors which can lead to their feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment. When teachers do not want to understand the



factors that shape their professional identity, they may develop feelings of disempowerment and marginalization in their workplace. On the other hand, if they learn to understand the factors they can create counter discourse and gain control over their professional lives.

The Guzman's study is useful for my study, as it uses the same methodology which has a potential to present complexity and richness of teachers' professional selves. What is more, it presents teachers' identity as the unique combination of different factors and values which lead either to teachers' empowerment or disempowerment.

I found two useful studies that show TEYL teachers' experiences of the macro and/ or meso reality that exist in the context when they work and live.

The first study was conducted by Brining (2015) who was interested in exploring teachers' experiences and attitudes towards TEYL, their attitudes towards training and continuing occupational development and their career pathway preferences. By adopting a phenomenological, constructivist approach, a mixed-methods survey of multiple-item self-report questionnaires and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 155 mixed-nationality EFL teachers (both native and non – native) from forty countries who are either employed in private language centres or give private tutorials, he aimed to answer the following research questions: 1) What challenges face teachers of English to Young Learners as a foreign language in private language centres?

2. What opportunities for training and occupational development are available to those teachers?

3. How do these opportunities help teachers meet the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language to Young Learners?

He presented the following findings of the study:

- TEYL teachers face different challenges that are present at the meso(classroom level) and include classroom and behaviour management, the selection and use of appropriate resources, communication with pupils and parents with different cultural backgrounds

- TEYL teachers did not have an opportunity to take part in basic training for TEYL teachers.
- TEYL teachers who did not receive basic training in TEYL are left to find out how to meet these challenges by themselves.
- Many TEYL teachers decided not to withdraw from the position of TEYL teachers because they enjoy the challenges. They felt they made a positive impact on young people's lives and find the rewards emotionally and intellectually satisfying.

The study by Brining (2015) is useful for my thesis, as it sheds a light on challenges faced by semi- specialists TEYL teachers in various contexts. The study highlights a need to support these teachers with a training that include some input on child language learning and development theory as well as classroom-based teaching practice. What is more, the study informs us that the TEYL teachers are resilient, motivated and willing to change the context in which they work and live and thus feel empowerment. Indeed, TEYL teachers from the studies managed to expand their professional and academic qualifications, and learned how to communicate with pupils and parents who have different cultural background.

The study conducted by Copland (et. al., 2014) focused on challenges experienced by TEYL teachers in various contexts. The researchers used a survey, which was completed by 4,459 teachers worldwide, and case studies, including observations and interviews with teachers in five different primary schools in five different countries: Spain, Italy, Columbia, South Korea and Tanzania to answer the following research questions: 1) What are teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in teaching English to young learners? 2. What challenges are experienced globally and locally? The findings of the research show that TEYL teachers from these different countries experience feelings of disempowerment mainly at the meso(classroom level). The teachers experienced difficulties with conducting speaking activities, maintaining pupils' motivation, differentiating pupils with different needsmaintaining discipline and large class size.

Secondly, I focused on studies that show how teachers use their agency in response to tensions that occur between macro and micro context in which they work and live. One of such studies is conducted by Buchanan (2015). She conducted a qualitative study on how 9 Californian primary school teachers make sense of their professional selves amid the reform climate. The study examines how teachers resist and negotiate their professional selves.

Two semi- structured interviews were conducted with each teacher within a three months' time in order to explore teachers' past personal and professional experiences.

The findings were organized into two sections. In the first section, a researcher shows that micro factors are the most powerful components of the professional identity. When teachers' identity fit/ or not fit the school context teachers feel they belong to teachers' community. If there is no fit, teachers feel constrained.

In the second section a researcher presents how teachers use their agency to feel empowered. The teachers used two kind of agencies: stepping up and pushing back. Stepping up means that teachers make every effort to be active members of a community. For example, one of the teachers responded positively to the demands of school policy and had a mission to take additional responsibilities. As a result, she was positioned as the excellent teacher. Another strategy, pushed back was also used by teachers. The teachers tried to reject, negotiate or reconfigure particular policy they do not agree with and which are not in accordance with the micro factors.

The study is useful, as it demonstrates how teachers use their life histories and school culture to interpret the assumptions of educational reforms. The study also highlights the importance of a healthy and collaborative school culture which is regarded as a tool where teachers can mediate their experiences.

Liu (et al., 2011) also conducted a study which investigates how an EFL teacher negotiates her professional self in a context of "new work order" in English Education Department at a Chinese university. The reform required teachers to adapt to student centered education and formative education. A teacher, whose

story is presented, was an ESL teacher in a Chinese university and felt comfortable with traditional pedagogy, that is teacher centered pedagogy and mechanical assessment. Although she opposed to the university policy, she was selected as a ESL teacher. She explained that it is because in the opinion of the university leaders her views could be transformed.

On the one hand, she did not want to be a member of the university community, however, as time passed by, she decided not to withdraw from the position and helped students to develop positive attitude towards learning. She tried her best to become acquainted with the assumptions of liberal pedagogy, however, more she knew about this pedagogy she did not like to follow its assumptions.

She claimed using two agency strategies: stepping up and pushing back and fluctuated between the assumptions of liberal and traditional pedagogies. She constantly compares the assumptions of liberal and traditional pedagogies.

When she finally got excluded from the community at first she became disillusioned, however, later she realized that she would have a chance to find a space to learn about herself, what teacher she would like to become.

The research is useful for my study, as it shows complexity of identity formation of one ELT teacher in a context of educational reform. Her story shows that the identity of ELT teacher is negotiated by a context in which she works and lives. The research also deepens the understanding of the role of agency that facilitates teacher learning.

Finally, the studies on teachers' professional identity explores the role of different professional development opportunities in empowering teachers in a context of educational reform.

Gillings de Gonzalez (2009) conducted an interpretive qualitative study on a small number of TESOL teachers' collective responses to an educational change in a Mexican University. In order to find answers for the following questions: 1) How did a particular group of teachers within my higher education context respond to change?, 2) What was the nature of their professional lives prior

to their engagement in the change process, 3) What were the issues involved in triggering, and sustaining their response to change?, 4) How did the change process affect them as individuals?, 5) What was the nature of their relationship with each other during the change process?

Gillings de Gonzalez (2009) conducted semi structured interviews with 12 TESOL teachers employed in a Mexican University. The purpose of interviews was to gain knowledge about academic lives before introduction of reform, academic life histories.

The findings show the uniqueness of teachers learning community in teacher empowerment. The teachers claimed that initially they felt marginalized by the University leaders as the study of language as a profession is not worth of respect. However, the teachers community in which they belong help them to emotionally understand the reform. The shared biographies, shared visions and beliefs, mutual respect and collective pride cemented teachers' relationships and helped them to adjust to the reform.

To summarize the section, the studies that were presented above showed the teachers' professional selves in a challenging contexts associated with implementation of educational reforms both in the mainstream education and second language learning. I presented studies that show different factors that shape empower or disempower teachers, how teachers use their agency in response to tension that occur between macro and micro factors that exist in a context, the role of different professional development opportunities in teacher empowerment.

Studies presented in this section show a wide range of different meso, macro and micro factors that exist in the context in which teachers work and live. Some of these factors lead to their feelings of empowerment some to disempowerment. Some of these studies were conducted in TEYL context which helps me to be aware of different factors being present in TEYL context like lack of basic TEYL training, poor access to CPD for TEYL teachers, problems with arranging suitable activities for young learners, problem with discipline. What is more, there are studies that show the role of agency and professional

development options that support teacher empowerment. However, to my astonishment I have not found any studies that focus on how TEYL teachers make sense of factors that shape their professional identity amid the context of educational reform in young learners' classroom, what strategies they use to feel empowered. I think, it would be interested to provide in rich detailed description of the TEYL teachers' agentic responses to the demands of the politics of the Ministry of Education and school culture and what is a role of different professional development opportunities(platforms) to feel empowered.

## **2.6 The Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study**

Current educational reforms are associated with implementation of powerful discourses which aim to regulate teachers' practice and pupils' progress. Therefore, there is a need to examine how teachers respond to these changes and what makes them change or resist the reform process.

Recent literature on teacher education shows that professional identity is related to how teachers respond to educational reforms. (Day et al., 2007). Professional identity is formed through the ongoing interaction between teachers and their work setting. How teachers perceive and understand the outcome of this interaction is mirrored in the following factors: macro (teachers' professionalism) meso (professional autonomy, collaboration between teachers) and micro (life histories). When teachers' discourses are challenged, teachers are less likely to actively engage with the reform process, proceed with its enactment and make changes to their existing practices.

The factors that shape teachers' professional identities are important for my own study into teachers' professional identity, as they highlight the ways in which the construction of professional identity among teachers reflect a complex interplay between wider discourses of professionalism, and teaching in Polish society, as well as those underpinning the reform on the one hand (which will position them in certain ways) ,and their own perspectives on the other hand (their own preferred positions).

When macro factors are taken into consideration, the teachers' professional identities are impacted by external processes that result from increasing need for well qualified teachers and the need for acceptance of teaching standards (Richards, 2008).

When the meso factors are taken into consideration, the teachers' professional identity is impacted by teachers' autonomy and collaboration between teachers. Micro factors also play pivotal role in formation of teachers' professional identity. Micro factors include teachers' beliefs, values and knowledge borne out of their previous experiences from the studies and workplaces as well as contacts with their family members and colleagues.

It seems that teaching as any other occupations is not entirely free from power that exist in the context in they work and live (Gee, 2000). There are always different discourses that have higher status, and which are regarded as those who control discourses to gain social wealth. In this way, they build hierarchical structures in society. The role of the powerful discourses is to create power to get things done against the desires of others (Tucker et al., 2000, p. 82) and in education the dominant role of the policy makers, and others such as head teachers may constrain the efforts of teachers to negotiate forms of identity that they regard as personally more meaningful. Teachers are more likely to maintain their sense of professional identity when they do not feel threatened and disempowered by the context in which they work and live. According to Canagarajah (1999) in many contexts teachers do not have voice in their classrooms which leads to their feelings of frustration. In light of above, there is a need to investigate how meso and macro factors interact with micro factors (teachers own beliefs and orientations) and impact on teachers' professional identity and potentially their feelings of disempowerment or empowerment.

As was noted in the previous sections of the chapter, I adopted a broadly post structural perspective to identity. According to this stance, teachers' professional identity is not stable, but constantly evolves (Palmer, 1998). Therefore, different macro and meso factors should be treated as discourses that are likely to be changed. It is important to notice that in the era of globalization there is no one way to think about the reform in young learners' classroom and this has

helped me understand that the meso and macro factors inform rather than necessarily constrain teachers' professional selves. Post structural perspective to identity helped me to understand that teachers are able to use agentive responses to the powerful discourses that they encounter. By using their professional agency teachers have the potential to resist and negotiate in order to create a place for themselves in both their schools and the current national policy and reform climate and in this way feel empowered (Buchanan, 2015).

To sum up, the theoretical framework, I adopted in the study, helped me to construct justification for my study. I aimed to investigate the macro (the politics of the Ministry of Education), meso( teachers' autonomy, collaboration with teachers' communities) and micro factors (teachers' life histories) that exist in a context in which TEYL teachers work and live lead to teachers' feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment. I also aimed to uncover what actions teachers take to feel empowered in a context of educational reform in young learners' classroom, namely what agentive strategies they employ in response to tensions that occur between macro/ meso factors and micro factors. My aim was also to highlight the importance of formal professional development programme (online platform) in teacher empowerment.

Therefore, based on the above, the study seeks to address the following research questions

1. What factors contribute to semi- specialists TEYL teachers' feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment in a context of educational reform in young learners' classroom?
2. What strategies do semi specialists TEYL teachers use to feel empowered?
3. In what ways does participation in the online platform for teachers professional development help teachers to feel empowered?

The theoretical framework I adopted in the study informed the research design of the study , namely interview framework and choice of methodology. The framework I adopted helped me to determine type of questions to be asked to



explore the issue of TEYL teachers' professional selves in a context of educational reform. I needed to discover the factors that exist in a context in which they live and work lead to their feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment, namely their initial ELT teachers' training, previous work experiences, their status as ELT teachers, autonomy in a classroom, relationships with other members of teachers' community. I also needed to discover the strategies teachers use to feel empowered. I was interested whether the online platform for teachers' professional development helped teachers to use their agentic capacities (micro factors) to resist and challenge dominant discourses.

As the focus of the study is professional selves of TEYL teachers in Polish context and based on the studies reported above, I have identified narrative interviewing as the most effective way to uncover those factors impacting on teachers' feelings of disempowerment and empowerment,.

## **2.7 summary**

This second chapter aimed to critically analyze the literature on teacher's professional identity. I discussed and defined this notion referring to the key literature in general literature and TESOL. I also referred to key studies on teacher professionalism and teacher's professional identity that relate to my study and show how teachers manage to mediate the challenging sociopolitical context in which they work. It is argued that there is need to explore how English language teachers see their professional career in relation to professionalism and identities. The next chapter of the thesis is devoted to presentation of philosophical and methodological assumptions of the study as well as methods of data collection and data analysis.

### 3.Methodology

The aim of the chapter is to explain how the study was conducted and how I addressed the research questions that I listed at the end of chapter 2 above. In this, I discuss the ontology and epistemology assumptions that underpin the research, the research design and data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter also discusses the ethical dimensions of the research, measures I have taken to ensure the quality of the data collection and interpretation of the study design.

#### 3.1. Ontological and epistemological assumptions

Every researcher who wants his/her inquiry to be not only systematic and consistent but also valuable to practitioners in a given field needs to reference a theoretical paradigm which has informed the study design. This is because different research designs assume different things about the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and reality (ontology) which not only influence the choice of methodology and methods of data collection, but also the nature of the research questions to be addressed and the ways in which data quality is to be assured. (Cohen et al., 1994). As I will show below, my ontological and epistemological positions demonstrate that I align myself with the interpretive paradigm.

The ontological position of a researcher shows how he/ she perceives reality. Central to debates about ontology is as (Ritchie et al., 2010) explain is :

*“whether reality exists independently of human conceptions and interpretations; whether there is a common shared, social reality or just multiple context- specific realities; and whether or not social behaviour is governed by laws that can be seen as immutable or generalizable” (p.11)*

The distinction is described in various ways by different authors. Blaikie (2003) for example, suggested distinction be drawn between realism and idealism, while Bryman (2008) referred to this as the difference between objectivism and constructionism (2008). Proponents of realism or objectivism believe that reality is created independently of the social actors (Bryman 2004) On the other hand, scholars who subscribe to idealism and constructionism believe that it is social actors who create reality.

On the other hand, epistemology deals with nature of knowledge. As Hammond and Wellington rightly observe, epistemology is concerned with how we come to know and understand the world (2012, p.57). The main epistemological conceptions are positivism and interpretivism (Ritchie et al., 2010). There are two major differences between these two approaches (Ritchie et al., 2010) .

Firstly, the relationship between a researcher and the social world is differently understood. Positivist epistemology believes the world is independent of and unaffected by a researcher, while interpretivist epistemology believes that a researcher cannot be objective and produce findings that are value free. Instead the findings are generated in a process of negotiation between a researcher and participants (Ritchie et al., 2010).

Secondly, these two approaches differently understand the truth in a research. Positivist epistemology assumes that through observation of the natural world a researcher can learn about independent reality. Interpretive epistemology, on the other hand, assumes that a researcher can learn about the reality through a process of negotiation between a researcher and participants.

The differences between positivist and interpretive epistemology are distinct, which means they are seen as opposed approaches to research. It is common to regard positivist epistemology to be used in natural sciences where certain hypotheses are tested and generalizations are made. By contrast, interpretive epistemology is used in social sciences and focus on descriptions and interpretation of the social world through participants and a researcher's perspective. However, as Denzin (et al., 2005) claim the differences between positivist and interpretive epistemologies become blurred (p. 191). These approaches should be regarded as complementary strategies appropriate to different types of research questions or issues under investigation (Ritchie et al., 2010 , p. 15).

My research project is in accordance with a growing trend to adapt pragmatist attitude to a debate on different ontological and epistemological perspectives, which states that different ontological and epistemological stances can be used to address research questions (Seale, 1999). I believe that individuals construct the meaning of their reality and as such in this study with its interest in under-

standing teachers of the educational reforms they face, I subscribe to the constructionist ontology and interpretative epistemology outlined above. I agree with Smit (2003) that individual people construct meaning of their reality. As he rightly observes, each teacher experiences and emotionally understands education policy change from his or her own point of view, and so encounters and conceives a different reality (Smit, 2003, p. 3). By adopting this perspective, I believe that each individual teacher brings his or her feelings and beliefs into his/ her perception of professional life. Each individual approaches the reality with his/her images, folk theories, beliefs, values which are meaningful to them (Gubrium et al. ,1995) but also that an individual constructs the meaning of reality with reference to social worlds (Crotty, 2009) or the “social interactions with significant others, in both the context, and the socio-cultural milieu in which a person lives and work”(Gubrium et al. , 1995, p.234).

The ontological and epistemological stance I subscribe to as a researcher constructivism and interpretivism is one that is associated with the interpretative research paradigm and is therefore the research paradigm that my research study is situated in. Research within this research paradigm adheres to a number of important principles and informed by a number of methodological traditions which I also see as relevant to my own study design and data collection procedures. Firstly, research within this tradition stresses the importance of human interpretations of a given phenomenon (Cohen et al., 1994). It was Immanuel Kant who in his Critique of Pure Reason stated that we gain the knowledge by observing the world and rethinking the particular the most important experiences. It should also be stated that an interpretive epistemology is rooted in the philosophy of hermeneutics (Crotty, 2009). One of the proponents of hermeneutics, German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, stated that to understand the meaning of human action requires grasping the subjective consciousness or intention of an actor from the inside (Schwandt, 1994, p. 296). For these reasons in-depth interviewing techniques are often regarded as a central method for data collection conducted in ways that allow participants voices to be heard without manipulation and intervention from the researcher (Atkinson, 2002, p. 156).

Research conducted in the interpretative paradigm is interested in developing in-depth thick and complex description of a given phenomenon. This may be

achieved by the use of multiple data collection methods or, as in the case of my own study, with its interest in understanding the nature of teachers' professional identity construction in the context of educational reform, a sampling strategy which will allow for multiple perspectives to be made visible. According to Marshall, social world is build out from many interpretive nets that are woven by individuals (Marshall et al.,1996, p. 484). The present study is driven by an assumption that there is no true or valid representation of the world, therefore there is a need to employ more than one participant in order to obtain different interpretations of a given phenomenon. Furthermore, it should be stated that sometimes the meaning is not easily accessible, simply because participants may have difficult in expressing their opinion or they lack knowledge. Therefore, the task of a researcher is to examine a given phenomenon from the point of view of different actors that participate in the study.

In terms of the approach taken to data analysis, the interpretive paradigm a researcher is able to make interpretations of how participants perceive the surrounding world. Participants are no longer are regarded to be observers of reality and are expected to perform the identity roles assigned by the culture, instead they are able to reflect on and question the surrounding reality. They are engaged in never ending process of deconstructing the reality (Freire, 2004).

While, as Edge (1998) claims, proponents of positivistic quantitative research regularly imply qualitative especially interpretative approach to human inquiry is so rife with threats to validity that it has no scientific value (Edge et al., 1998,p. 336) However, it does not mean that interpretative research is of no value. Many interpretive researchers make effort to prove that their study strives for trustworthiness. It can be done by adopting qualitative equivalents that parallel quantitative approaches to validity. For example, instead of seeking a representative sample it is suggested to employ information rich sampling strategy (Perry, 1998, p. 5). In here, the rule that states the larger sample the better generalization does not apply. Instead the researcher should aim to select a sample that is sufficient to address the research questions set and to gain sufficient depth of understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

All of these points were borne in mind in the development of the research design to address my research questions, in identifying sample size, and the collection and analysis of the data generated.

### **3.2 Research design**

The purpose of the study reported in this thesis is to uncover the perspectives of TEYL educators in Poland who have not received formal training input with respect to their experience of a period of significant reform of primary schooling in Poland. Given this, and in line with the points made above about the objectives of research within an interpretative tradition, interviews were seen as the best way to achieve this. More specifically, I saw the purpose of these interviews as providing an opportunity for teachers to tell their story, and as such saw my research as fitting within a narrative research orientation, an established form of qualitative inquiry within the interpretative research tradition.

Narrative inquiry can be described as an approach to data collection and analysis which is not only interested in story or narrative as a phenomenon, but also as a method (Reisman, 2008, Clandinin et al. , 2007). It should be noted that researchers who use narrative inquiry present different views on the analysis and presentation of narrative accounts Reisman (2008) identified four main approaches to analysis of narrative accounts: thematic, structural, dialogic performance and visual. A researcher who uses one of these approaches shows relationships that exist between the narrator and the audience, immediate context and wider socio-cultural historical and political setting (Reisman, 2008).

Narrative research has a long tradition in sociology and anthropology and it can be understood as an approach that allows individuals to share their experiences (both past and present) and an analysis of these that “draws together diverse events, happenings and actors of human life into thematically unified goal- directed processes” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). A researcher who uses narrative research in sociology or anthropology can adopt one of the analytical approaches to narrative analysis mentioned above, however, they can also adopt experience- centred narrative (Squire, 2008). In this approach, a researcher operates with a view of subjectivity as essentially storied, located in and a response to lived experience within landscapes that are themselves storied (Clandinin et al., 2000, p. 145).

Narrative research has gained in popularity in the study of educational phenomena in recent years (e.g. Clandinin et al., 2000), and in particular with regard to

the study of identity. It is because by presentation of narrative accounts a researcher is able to find out what meanings participants attach to various experiences.

Although narrative methodology has its opponents and critics, there are a number of benefits of this approach which convinces me to use this approach in this research project. In line with the theoretical framework underpinning this study introduced in chapter 2 above, I saw narrative interviewing as a way to capture the experiences and perspectives of teachers that would reveal the ways in which these are shaped by macro discursive elements of their experience, relationships and interactions at the level of the institution and community (meso factors), as well as micro factors, their own personal beliefs and histories. Since narrative research is a methodological tradition which specifically seeks to explore the development of self over time or biography as well other influences through individuals interactions in social worlds, I decided that this approach provided a good fit to the aims and objectives of my research. A narrative research approach, with its emphasis on collecting participants' accounts of reform is therefore seen as a valuable way to uncover the relationship between events and teachers feelings of disempowerment and empowerment (research questions 1 and 2). However, it is also provides a mechanism for uncovering the strategies they deploy to increase a feeling of empowerment and the extent to which participation in the online platform helps with this (research question 3)

### 3.2.1 The use of narrative interviews

In order to present teachers stories, I employed semi structured interviews as the method of data collection. In this study I used the less structured methods of interviewing that are suitable for narrative methodologies. When a researcher wishes to investigate teachers' experiences and their deep rooted beliefs about teaching gained in the past he/ she needs to use semi structured interviews which proved to be more effective than observations, or questionnaires (Wragg, 2002)



The interview guide was informed by the theoretical framework which I developed in the chapter 2 with its emphasis on macro meso and micro dimensions of professional identity construction and the extent to which this is seen as empowering or disempowering. However, in developing the interview guide I also drew on my own experiences as a general primary teacher and TEYL teacher in a lower primary school, mentioned in Chapter 1 above.

In line with this, I assumed that teachers professional identity which was the elected lens through which I sought to examine teachers feelings of empowerment and disempowerment in the context of educational reform is the result of a complex interplay between past history and current social interactions and experiences and I thus designed my interview framework to describe their professional knowledge gained during their and their professional status. I also sought to uncover their views about the implementation of educational reforms in the young learners' classroom (macro factors), the degree of autonomy in their work and their collaboration with the head teachers and other colleagues (meso factors), how their beliefs and values gained during studies and previous workplaces impacted on their vision of educational reform in young learners' classroom (micro factors) and whether the online platform for teachers professional development helped teachers to raise their professional status as TEYL teachers.

I also kept in mind Wenger's insights into the way teachers' professional identity is impacted by professional communities (see chapter 2.3.2) and the value of constructs such as belonging, engagement and alignment in understanding teachers responses to educational reform and the relationship between this and feelings of disempowerment or empowerment. Thus, for example, I sought to establish their sense of belonging by uncovering their experiences of their first days as young learner teachers, their relationship with other teachers, their engagement with the norms and values in their schools, and the extent to which they felt they could align with the assigned identity positions offered them by the community, and the relationship between this and feelings of disempowerment and the strategies adopted to empower themselves.

Prior the interview process I designed the interview guide that comprises of the following questions I would like to focus during interviews:

- What attracted/ did not attract you to teaching young learners?
- What did you study for your BA/ MA and where did you study?
- Were you satisfied with the knowledge obtained during your studies at teachers' training college?
- How did you feel as a graduate of private teacher training college?
- What did you do after graduation from your BA?
- Why did you apply for a job in young learners' classroom?
- Were you satisfied with obtaining a position in young learners' classroom?
- How your first days in a school look like ?
- Did you feel welcomed and supported by a head teacher/ general primary teacher/ other young learners' teachers?
- What is your opinion on implementation of the three steps of the educational reform: lowering the age in which children start to learn English, introduction of creative methods of teaching and AFL?
- Did you feel that the knowledge obtained during the studies empowers/ disempowers your experience?
- What support did you seek to feel empowered?
- What is your opinion about the platform?
- Could you please say in what way did platform help you to feel empowered?

Before interviews the teachers received these questions to be informed about the focus of the research and reflect on their professional career. During the interviews I asked general questions like : How did you become TEYL teacher? and allow teachers to tell the stories of their professional lives. I used the interview guide as a kind of check point and asked additional questions when I felt that certain item from the guide was not discussed.

### **3.3The research participants**

The participants in my study, as indicated in chapter 1 above were five non-specialist TEYL teachers, those who had not graduated from public 3- year

teacher training colleges and who had been invited to participate in the online platform for professional development. Details of these participants (referred to by pseudonyms) are shown below

Name	Qualifications	Teaching experience
Marta	Private teacher training college for English teachers for all age learners	Private tutorials for adult learners for two years.  She started her teaching career in young learners' classroom in 2014
Emma	English Language Philology(translation major) in one of the public universities, CELTA diploma for ELT teachers	She has taught various age groups: young learners, age 8-10 and teenagers in private language schools for 2 years. She started her teaching career in the public young learner's classroom in 2012.
Krystyna	Russian language philology, Certificate in Advanced English issued by Cambridge University	She has taught Russian Language to primary and secondary school pupils (age 11-17) for 20

		years. She started her teaching career in the young learner's classroom in 2010
Agnieszka	Applied Linguistics Department (translation major), post-graduate 2 year MA studies in teaching English as a second language to all age groups at a private high school.	After graduation from Applied Linguistic department she spent one year in the US in an Au pair program. She started her teaching career in young learners' classroom in 2014 just after she had graduated from 2 years MA program for ELT teachers.
Wiktoria	Private teacher training college for English language teachers for all age groups	She was employed as an English language teacher in public gymnasium for pupils with special needs for 1 year. She started her teaching career in young learners' classroom in 2014

In identifying these five participants, I was aware that the quality and size of a sample need to be carefully linked to the aims of the research and the research questions and that the sample strategy adopted is one of the key criteria by which the validity of the research findings and conclusions is established.

What is more, the reason for a decision to conduct my research with a small group of teacher is my analysis of the literature on qualitative research. It is claimed, that a small number of participants is adequate for this kind of research (Kvale, 2007). I also think that although the number of participants is small, I managed to select participants who have experience of the phenomenon being explored (Yates et al, 2012). Teachers who participated in the study have different life stories prior to employment in lower primary schools. This means that I can deepen my understanding of the factors that can shape teachers' professional lives.

What is more, I needed candidates who have time to willingly take part in a study that involves interviews section and e- mail correspondences. English language teachers in Polish schools are mostly very busy trying to combine their family chores with teaching responsibilities. What is more, the majority of teachers teach at private language schools and give private tutorials. Taking this into consideration finding participants who have time to take part in the project was challenging.

The participants of the study were expected to share with me their concerns with the implementation of the educational change. I assumed that they would be afraid to share details of their concerns with educational change as they may bring professional risks from colleagues and a head master (Lee et al., 2011). I was employed in one of the institution for several years, therefore, two of my participants were afraid I would share details of their interviews with a head teacher. However, I ensured them that I would keep the information only for the purpose of the research. In a time of high unemployment rate among teachers in Poland my participants are afraid that by revealing sensitive information about local school community they will lose their jobs. Therefore I needed participants with whom I had mutual understanding that I would not share the data

with the school community (Frankfort et al., 1992) which was addressed by the use of consent forms and by assurances of anonymity included in these.

In this research, I used convenience sampling (Yates et al, 2012). A researcher who exploits this sample chooses participants based on availability, ease and low cost (Marshall, 1996). Access to participants was established in a following way. I contacted the Main Centre of Teachers' professional Development who is responsible for the online platform for teachers professional development. I asked the Centre to send my welcoming mail to all 50 teachers who participated in experimental versions of the online platform for teacher professional development from Warsaw and Lublin area. In an e-mail I gave a brief description of the research project I aimed to conduct and information why I consider the research important for understanding professional self of TEYL teachers. I decided to send the welcoming E-mail to 50 TEYL teachers as I did not expect to get huge response. I knew that teachers are busy fulfilling their professional and learning duties and I would have problems with encouraging them to participate in the study. Initially, 8 teachers responded to my welcoming e-mail, however, due to different circumstances (illness, lack of time) only the 5 teachers, whose details are provided above, actually took part. This was disappointing and created a dilemma for me, whether I should stick to a small number of participants or change the focus of my studies. But comforted by the small sample size often used in narrative research and since there is a dearth of research studies that examine TEYL teachers sense of their professional selves in the light of reforms and the extent to which professional development opportunities such as the use of the learning platform empower TEYL teachers in a context of educational reforms, I assumed the study is worthy of investigation.

### **3.4 Data collection procedures**

The data was collected using the following procedure. Firstly, before entering the field I completed the approval certificate. This means that the framework of this study was approved by the chair of the Exeter University Ethical Committee. The filled form is attached in the appendix (See Appendix 1). Then, I asked the participants to fill the Polish version of informed consent form. It basically contains information regarding issues of anonymity and confidentiality. This

document is also attached in the appendix section (see Appendix 2) - original version of the consent form, and Appendix 3- Polish version).

Next, I asked two of my colleagues who are TEYL teachers (but who were not participants in the study and did not participate in the online platform for teachers professional development) to pilot my interview questions. I asked the teachers to critically analyse the questions I were going to ask my participants. I was interested to know, if my questions were not misleading and if they understood the meaning of the questions the way I intended. The teachers told me that my questions provoke short answers and there is a chance that the participants would ignore certain question. Therefore, I decided that I will give the teachers a list of questions (see section 3.2.1 ) that I wanted to explore and which could stimulate teachers to relate stories and more detail about their professional lives.

The interviews with the teachers were arranged to suit the participants' busy schedules. The participants were asked to identify the time and place that was most suitable for them. I wanted the venue of interviews to be comfortable, safe and quiet (Radnor, 2002). The participants were offered three places to choose from : (their classroom, their home or a public library). The interviews lasted about 1-2 hours each. I asked my participants whether they preferred their interview to be conducted in Polish their mother tongue or in English. All the teachers opted to hold the interview in English. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were presented to the participants to ensure that the data were valid. What is more, by asking the participants to validate the data I aimed to give the participants a "sense of control over the material and reduce the risk of feeling vulnerable"(Chase, 2005, p. 48). When I transcribed the interviews I asked the participants to validate the data. For example, in a first interview Agnieszka made harsh comments about her secondary school teacher, however, later when she read the transcript from her interview she decided to soften her opinions.

### 3.5 Data analysis

All interviews were recorded as mp3 files. I used the most common method of data transcription that is typing. I listened to the tape two times before transcribing. Since repetitive listening to a taped interview allows a researcher to develop ideas about the emerging themes (Goodson et al., 2001, p.1), I listened to each tape twice before transcribing. To ensure that the important issues are not omitted, Kvale suggested employing another researcher who will help to type interviews (Kvale, 2007, p. 146). However, this method has its disadvantages. I assume that a researcher who abides by the ethical procedures should not allow other people to gain insights into the data so, although a slow and painstaking task I decided to complete this process entirely on my own. I made an individual file for each participant in which I gathered data from interviews and I labelled each file with participant's pseudonym. Then, I analysed each file separately. I checked each file for error and omissions. To make transcriptions easier to analyse I decided to rewrite them into more formal written style (Kvale, 2007, p. 146). I was aware of the fact that all verbatim data are subject to ethical regulations. Therefore, as explained above, after editing the transcriptions I presented them to the participants..

Once the transcripts were ready, I set about systematic analysis of the data. I followed narrative analysis suggested by Squire (2008) and analysed research texts according to research questions. I realized that the narrative accounts I obtained let me to answer research questions: 1,2,and 3. In the first step of analysis I managed to generate a number of categories that relate to my research questions: Fear of being employed in young learners' classroom, poor channels of communication with the Ministry, head teachers and other teachers, strategies teachers use to feel empowered, the role of platform. The verbatim that are in accordance with these categories was colour coded to find repeating ideas that emerged. An example of the first step of data analysis can be seen in the appendix 4 (see Appendix 4).

In a second stage of the analysis I grouped the color coded extracts into several tables ( see : Appendix 5). In this way I was able to find themes. For example under a category: poor channels of communication with the Ministry I identified the following themes: disagreement over qualifications needed for teachers,



contradictory information on the educational reform, lack of training. By organizing the categories and themes around the research questions and the conceptual framework I developed in the chapter 2 I presented cross narrative analysis that are faithful to teachers' accounts. The results of the cross narrative analysis is presented in the chapter 5.

I asked my colleagues who were doctoral students at that time to critically analyse my research process. The feedback I received influenced my research process while contributing greatly to considering aspects that I had not considered before (Guba et al., 1989, p. 31).

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

Although I decided to include a separate section devoted to ethical consideration that were addressed in the process of conducting the research, still discussion of certain ethical issues is present also in other sections of this study. As I have mentioned, my research was approved by the chair of the Exeter University Ethical Committee (Appendix 1) Then, I asked my participants to sign a Polish version of the consent form (see Appendix 3). Although the interviews were conducted in English, I prepared the Polish version of the document, as I would like my participants feel relaxed and comfortable at the beginning of our cooperation. The participants were informed about the aims of the project and the issues that concerned confidentiality of the information. The teachers were informed that they can withdraw from the project any time they wish to. I also exploited Bell's framework which is presented below to eliminate the discomfort of the participants ( Bell 1991).

1. All participants must be given the chance to remain anonymous. (I used the pseudonyms rather than real names of participants). Furthermore, I followed Frankfort- Nachmias and Nachmias suggestions and kept all the interview recordings in password – protected files (Frankfort- Nachmias et al., 1992).

2. All data must be given strict confidentiality. Following Frankfort- Nachmias and Nachmias advice I assured that the head teacher and other members of the school community do not have access to the information about participants (Frankfort- Nachmias et al 1992).

3. Interviewees should have the chance to verify statements at the stage of drafting the report. I presented the readers with the transcriptions of the interviews as well as English transcription of the fragments of the transcription that were relevant for the researcher. This procedure enabled the participants to verify the previously gathered data.

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, the choice of the topic of the research and my interview framework was strongly influenced by my professional baggage, that is my experience as a TEYL teacher in Polish primary school. I was aware of the fact that exploring TEYL teachers' professional identity can be intrusive to teachers, as they can find my questions about some details about their professional lives harmful. Therefore, I tried my best to form such questions that would not cause harm and stress.

According to the literature, during a process of data analysis I should value neutrality and forget about different pressures in their professional life (Guzman, 2010). However, I realized that achieving neutrality cannot be achieved. I kept in mind my professional experiences as TEYL teacher during the process of data analysis and data reporting.

### **3.7 Research quality**

A researcher who conducts his/ her research in interpretative stance does not believe in one vision of reality and as such does not see research quality as determined by objectivity or notions of reliability and validity which are associated with research conducted within the scientific paradigm. Rather, the focus is on a notion of quality and rigour that underpins what (Cresswell, 2009) refers to as trustworthiness. In this section I will explain the procedures I have taken to ensure that three key criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, and transferability have been followed (Johnson et al., 1992).

#### **3.7.1 Credibility**

When credibility is taken into consideration, a researcher needs to make sure that a reader receives "a credible version of what happened in the research process both in terms of description and interpretation (Given, 2008, p. 138). A

potential reader needs to know “ all the methodological procedures the author adopted to establish a high harmony between the participants’ expressions and the researchers’ interpretations of them” (Given 2008, p. 138). In order to achieve the credibility of the findings I made sure that the choice of methods of data collection was well thought out. I tried to use methods that were well established. I browsed through various studies that aimed to explore teachers’ professional identity and identified semi- structured narrative interviews as an effective way to explore teachers’ professional identity.

What is more, to ensure the credibility of the interview process, as explained earlier after the interviews were conducted I transcribed all the interviews and sent them by e- mail to the participants for member checking (Creswell ,2009) so that they could confirm their responses, to suggest any amendments to the data (Punch, 2013).

The feedback I received from the TEYL teachers convinced me that data I obtained were an accurate and adequate account of their views.

Another step I have taken to ensure credibility was the approach taken to data analysis. The various stages of the analysis procedure were undertaken to “ensure that constructs, categories, explanations and interpretations make sense (Patton, 1980, p. 339). I also adopted peer debriefing.

Finally, I tried to provide detailed description of the background to my research (history of TEYL in Poland, implementation of subsequent steps of educational reform in young learners’ classroom, ELT and TEYL teacher education) in chapter 1, analysis of the categories and subcategories that emerged from the data analysis that relate to my research questions and particularly participants’ feelings of disempowerment or empowerment. In this way, I hoped the reader “could feel they have experienced or could experience what transpired in my study” (Creswell ,2009, p. 129).

### 3.7.2 Dependability

Dependability is another way in which the trustworthiness of research is assured. In order to ensure dependability of the findings a researcher needs to make sure that “ the process of enquiry was logical , traceable and documented” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). To increase the dependability of my research I checked all the interviews for errors, codes and categories for their consistency (Gibbs, 2007). I have also devoted time to document all the steps of the research process (Creswell, 2009). The aim of the explanation of all the steps of research process is to show that the procedures I have adopted are justifiable.

- Step 1. University of Exeter’s Graduate School of Education Approval , Participants’ consent documents- the documents are included as appendices.
- Step 2. Literature review- In chapter 2 I included detailed literature that relate to different positions on professional identity, different factors that inform teachers’ professional identity.
- Step 3. Conceptual framework in chapter 2- macro, meso and micro factors that build teachers’ professional identity interrelate and lead to their feeling of disempowerment or empowerment.
- Step 4. Research design in chapter 3- qualitative research, a narrative approach and a semi-structured interview framework that is related to my experiences as a TEYL teacher, informal talks with my colleagues and my theoretical framework developed in chapter 2
- Step 5. Selection of participants and my sampling strategy
- Step 6. Data collection procedures detailed in this chapter, my use of semi- structured interviews, the format and storage of the data
- Step 7 Data analysis procedures reported in this chapter above

### 3.7.3 Transferability

Transferability of research means that a researcher needs to make sure that the findings of the research can be generalized to other similar settings (Denzin et al., 2005). Schwandt (1994) claims that studies that adopted interpretative framework do not aim to generate findings that can be transferred to other contrast. Rather, interpretive studies aim to present the uniqueness of an individual context. In the case of my research my goal was to present macro, meso and

micro factors that impact professional identity of TEYL teachers employed in Polish primary schools, different strategies teachers use to feel empowered and in what way does participation in the online platform for teachers professional development help teachers to feel empowered. However, there are researchers who argue that the findings of a given research can be seen as transferable to similar contexts (Ritchie et al., 2010).

I believe that the findings of my research can be transferred to other context especially Central European Countries. As I mentioned in the chapter 1, in many countries there is willingness to expand TEYL teachers qualifications. A TEYL teacher need to have C1 language proficiency and through knowledge on methods of teaching suitable for young learners. The Ministry assume that only graduates of public 3- year teacher training colleges meet the above requirements. As a result, the teachers who are currently employed in lower primary classrooms and are graduates of Russian Philology, private 3- years teachers training colleges are regarded as underqualified. The findings of my research could be useful for researchers who explore professional careers of TEYL teachers employed in primary schools located in other Central European countries. In countries like Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Romania graduates of Russian Philology and of private teacher training colleges are also considered as underqualified in comparison to the graduates of public teacher training colleges. The findings from my research can therefore potentially help the educational authorities in these countries to provide platform for these teachers voices to be heard and for them to receive greater recognition and support. In order to facilitate the process of transferability of the findings, I provided the thick and detailed description of the context which TEYL teachers experience.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter has discussed in detail the research design of this study in order to explain how I achieved the objectives of the study on the professional selves of TEYL teachers in Polish primary schools. I discussed my philosophical stance and the choice of methodology. In addition, I also discussed the processes of data collection and analysis adopted by the research as well as the research quality, and how I addressed ethical considerations. The next chapter presents

the findings of the study to answer the research questions listed in the chapter 2.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the results of the analysis of the data, that is the cross-e thematic analysis of the TEYL teachers' narrative interviews regarding their professional identity at a time of educational reform in the young learners' classroom in Poland.

The findings are organised around the three research questions which are reproduced for convenience below:

1) What factors contribute to semi- specialists helps teachers to feel empowered in a classroom.

Below TEYL teachers' feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment in a context of educational reform in young learners' classroom

2) What strategies do semi-specialist TEYL teachers use to feel empowered?

3) In what ways does participation in the online platform for teachers professional development help teachers to feel empowered?

In the first part of the chapter, I present factors according to the three areas of factors highlighted in my theoretical framework in chapter 2, namely, macro, meso and micro factors. The second part of the chapter reports on the strategies teachers use to feel empowered, and the final part of the chapter on how the participation in the online platform for teachers professional development , I shall present a list of three main themes and the sub-themes that emerged from the coding process.

Codes and sub-codes

- 1) Factors that lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment/ empowerment
  - a) Macro factors - poor channels of communication with the Ministry of Education
    - Disagreement over the qualifications needed for young learners teachers
    - Contradictory information on the educational reform

- Lack of training for teachers
- b) Meso factors- poor channels of communication with the head teachers and other teachers
  - Not taking into consideration teachers' beliefs and previous experiences
  - Not taking into consideration the recommendations of the Ministry and the centres of teachers professional development
  - Lack of cooperation between teachers
- c) Micro factors- Reasons for fear associated with becoming English language teacher
  - Low status of young learners teachers

2) Different strategies teachers use to feel empowered

- referring to role models
- seeking support from family members and colleagues

3) The role of the online platform for teachers professional development in helping teachers to feel empowered

- having access to knowledge on young learners methods of teaching
- gaining critical skills
- recognising the importance of collaboration between teachers

## **4.2 Factors that lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment/ empowerment**

The analysis of TEYL teachers' narratives show that all teachers feel disempowered by their move into TEYL field. In a table below, I present macro, meso and micro factors that lead to teachers' disempowerment. A summary of the themes identified under each of these dimensions is shown below

Macro factors: poor channels of communication with the Ministry of Education :

- Disagreement over qualifications needed for young learners teachers
- Contradictory information on the educational reform



- Lack of training for teachers

Meso factors: Poor channels of communication with the head teachers and other teachers

- Not taking into consideration teachers' beliefs
- Not taking into consideration the recommendations of the Ministry and teachers professional development
- Lack of cooperation between teachers

Micro factors: Fear associated with being employed in young learners' classroom

- Low status of young learners teachers

#### 4.2.1 Macro factors- Poor channels of communication with the Ministry of Education

In this section, I included teachers' accounts on the macro factors that lead to their feelings of disempowerment. The data have shown that the subsequent steps of educational reform in young learners' classroom and in teacher education have threatened the teachers' professional identity and had a negative impact on teachers' sense of professionalism.

As mentioned in chapter 2, macro factors impinging on teachers are those which relate to institutional discourses and practices, government policies and initiatives (Opfer et al., 2011). In the case of Poland, as discussed in chapter 1, the Ministry introduced more robust professional standards for TEYL teachers in order for them to be well positioned in the society. The curricula of the 3- year teachers training colleges aims to raise teachers' professional status. The curricula comprises of three elements that are closely associated with ELT teacher professionalism: language proficiency, language awareness and pedagogical content knowledge (Andrews, 2003). Although modification of the curricula was an important step in raising professional steps of raising professional status of TEYL teachers, still the participants of my study complained about poor communication of the Ministry of Education in regards to the qualifications needed for young learners teachers, lack of training and contradictory information on educational reforms in young learners classroom with those TEYL teachers who did not graduate from public 3- years teacher training colleges who were

established in 2012. All of these things were felt to be disempowering by teachers as extracts from the data below illustrate.

### *Disagreement over qualifications needed for young learners teachers*

Although in the announcement the Ministry said that graduates of both public and private 3- years teacher training colleges, Russian philology and CELTA diplomas have a right to teach young learners, still they did not ensure that the head teachers complied to their recommendations.

The teachers claimed that the Ministry did not ensure that the graduates of 3- year teachers training colleges for all groups of learners that were established in 2004 were given equal rights to find employment in public schools.

Marta provided a brief account of how her qualifications gained in private 3- year teacher training college are regarded as unsatisfactory to seek employment neither in secondary nor in primary schools. She graduated from one of private 3- year teacher training college in 2009. Although she participated in the methodology course that was approved by the Ministry, she was treating as the teacher of lower status in comparison with the graduates of public universities.

*“I think that the Ministry treat as very unfair. We participated in intensive methodology course for young adults learners so I sent maybe thousands of applications to secondary schools, but they were all rejected. I was told that they prefer graduates of public universities”*

Her language qualifications in opinion of head teachers were low, therefore, she was asked to seek employment in a lower primary classroom. She stated the following:

*“But when I finally got a post of a teacher in lower primary school they said that my language and methodological qualifications are not in good standards.”*

What is more, Wiktorina offered very harsh comment on the attitude towards the graduates of private 3- years teacher training. She graduated from a private 3-

years teacher training college that offered extensive methodology course for English language learners of different age groups.

*“My colleague who had conspiracy attitude to life told me that it is because the teachers employment agencies who are associated with the Ministry wanted to punish our university to introduce young learners module. Now I think she was right. We had unique chance to participate in three methodological modules, one for young learners, one for teenagers and one for secondary school students. In each module apart from learning theoretical subjects we also did some practical tasks like designing bank activities. When I was looking for a job in a teenagers and young adults section my applications were rejected”.*

Krystyna's story is an example of unfair practices towards the graduates of Russian Philology. She, like many other former Russian language teachers was at first welcomed as an English language teacher in higher grades of a primary school, however, later when the number of well qualified graduates of English Philology increased she was dismissed. She stated the following:

*“When Russian language lost its status as the main second language I lost the job. I was told numerous time that I could took one year leave at school and prepared myself for Cambridge Advanced English Certificate. This certificate allowed me to seek employment as an English language teacher in higher grades of primary school. At this time they needed English language teachers so they welcomed me in classroom. In March 2010 the school employed more qualified teacher. This teacher had graduated from English Teacher training College just recently. The head master did not want to dismiss me and offered me a job in lower primary classroom”*

When she asked for an explanation for her dismissal from a higher primary school, she was given a following answer:

*“ I contacted the Ministry and asked them if the decision of the head teacher was acceptable. However, I was told that now with the increase of a number of graduates of English Philology who wish to take a post of English language teacher I will have problems with finding suitable job. She also suggested me to take studies in English Philology as without it I will never become respected teacher”.*

#### ***Contradictory information about the reform in young learners classroom***

It appeared that the Ministry of National Education and local teachers assessment centres sent contradictory information to teachers and parents on the educational reform in young learners classroom.

The Ministry of Education informed the public about the plans to lower obligatory school age, however, majority of schools did not make any preparations. It is because the rumours suggested the reform would not be implemented. Emma made the following comment

*“I think that every- one who live in this country heard about this reform. There were constant debates among politicians and experts. However, the teachers were not informed about exact date of implementation”*

The lack of decision of the politicians has a number of negative consequences. Firstly, the parents lacked basic information about the functioning of young learners' classroom after the reform which led to information chaos

Krystyna for example made the following comment:

*“ What happened before the implementation of reform I can compare to chaos. The parents heard horror stories about lack of preparedness of lower primary schools. As a result some teachers waited till the last moment to sign their pupils to first grade or decided to withdrew their children from school”.*

Emma also added her comment to this issue:

*“In the spring before the reform we were bombarded with visits of parents who wanted to visit the school and check if the classrooms are ready for the reform. We could not function normally in such circumstances”*

Secondly, the teachers could not plan the syllabus for the next school year, as they did not receive information from the kindergartens about each child development. Marta made a following comment:

*“As the main teacher told me that in previous years every main classroom teacher received psychological diagnosis of every child that is admitted into a classroom. It was helpful for teachers as she knew in advance about strength and weaknesses of each child. Now in this information chaos the psychologists and kindergarten teachers did not prepare diagnosis. This mainly concerned 6 year old children”*

Later, in the interview she described how lack of diagnosis negatively influenced everyday work of teachers.

Marta presented the following comment after the first lesson in the first grade of lower primary school:

*“ I really spent lots of time on preparation on my first lesson. I read many lessons examples and tips given by experienced teachers. I prepared many activities that suited children with various intelligences. However, the lesson was considered as disaster, I did not know that several children had problems with handling their emotions and cried when they have failure, or do not recognize colours even in Polish” . I realised that when I knew earlier about weaknesses of each child I would prepare different materials and group activities”.*

Third, the Ministry wrongly diagnosed the real needs of schools at the time of educational reform. In order to calm parents' emotions they claimed that technical conditions are the main problems of Polish schools. However, these problems in opinion of the Ministry can be easily solved by making good use of financial grants. Emma said:

*“I think that the Ministry and the politicians wanted to please the parents of the children who are going to be admitted into school. Because their main worry was the poor quality of educational resources the Ministry appealed to the head teachers to apply for financial grants for educational resources”.*

Marta also added that false information sent to parents has negative consequences for the reputation of a school. Marta heard in the news that all schools are prepared for welcoming 6 year old children to the first grade of primary classroom. However, Marta claimed that at the beginning of the school year the parents may be disappointed. She stated the following: .

*“In the news the Ministry informed the public that schools would be ready for 6 year old children. The schools she told would have carpet to play on, different toys like in kindergarten. But the reality is different, my classroom has a small space where the children can sit on the floor, however, when I want them to see pictures on the blackboard they have to sit at the desks, otherwise they would not*

*see properly. The children seat in three rows. I would like to arrange the seats differently, but it is not enough space. The school is too poor to buy enough art equipment for children whose parents cannot afford it. Now I cannot plan any art activity as suggested by the Ministry as there would be kids who do not have materials”*

The next theme that appeared in interviews is the contradictory information sent to teachers by teacher trainers from teacher assessment agencies whose role is to monitor school progress. This theme appeared in interviews with Emma and Marta who were employed in a school where the progress was unsatisfactory. For Emma, the role of teachers assessment centre is to support teachers in reforming schools. However, the activities of the experts from teachers assessment centres had reverse results. Emma claimed:

*“The teachers in our school treated the reform as punishment for bad tests results. It should not be like this. Implementation of creative methods and AFL should not be treated as a punishment but at the beginning of September, the rumors came that the headmaster wanted to improve the quality of teaching in our school. The consultants from the professional teachers development agency came to our school. We had to fill questionnaires, present lesson plans. The teachers started to panic you know what classroom the consultant will visit. It was a nightmare”.*

Furthermore, the teachers complained that introduction of creative methods of teaching and AFL in English language classroom for young learners is not in accordance with the reality of Polish classroom. Teachers stated that the main challenge they have to face is to introduce the teaching methods based on a course book. The course books that were previously approved by the Ministry of Education are not in accordance with the assumption of the reform.

The teachers for example cannot change their course book during the school year, when they noticed that the materials are not suited to children's needs: Krystyna stated the following:

*“I noticed problem with a course book. The course book need to be chosen taking into consideration children needs. This year the children in the first grade of my classroom were so mature, even the youngest ones. They did not like to listen to silly stories or fairy tales. They kept telling me they are pupils not children from kindergarten. I saw in the book store fantastic course book that have information about nature and surrounding world but this course book is*

*not on a list approved by the Ministry. I do not understand at all how the Ministry introduce reform and at the same time do not regularly inspect list of course book for young children”.*

What is more, teachers noticed that the course books previously approved by the Ministry are not in accordance with the assumption of the educational reform. Marta claimed that the course book she chose uses traditional form of assessment instead of AFL that is recommended currently. She claimed the following:

*“The teachers assessment centres informed us that we should prepare children to assess their own learning. In my opinion still the course book does not encourage children and teachers to self - assessment. The course books I use in a classroom use traditional approach to assessment. After each chapter pupils are tested and given marks. The question is how it is possible to introduce self - assessment and then at the same time asked teachers to use course book which promote traditional assessment. The thing is you know that people from teachers assessment office knew that we use course book in a classroom and ask us to introduce self - assessment. In my opinion it will be better to wait till next year when probably they will adopt course book to requirements of AFL”.*

What is more, the publishers of English language materials for young learners fit their course books with plenty of educational tasks and activities, which teacher do not have time to introduce additional activities. Marta stated the following:

*“these books are so colourful, and the exercises and tasks seem to be interesting. However, a problem arises whether I should ask the children to fill the book or organize additional activities? I heard negative opinions from parents who spent lots of money on these books and complain that not all, the exercises were done”.*

#### ***Lack of training for young learners teachers***

The teachers expressed their concerns about lack of training for TEYL teachers.

The main issue that teachers raised is lack of modules devoted to teaching English to young learners in curriculum of many private 3- years teachers training colleges.

Although Marta is generally satisfied with the teacher training she received during her studies in a private teachers training college, she was unpleasantly surprised that a module for young learners was not introduced:

*“It is a pity that we did not learn anything about young learner teaching during studies. I cannot imagine that the people from the university did not know that young learners will one day become popular. I sometimes feel awkward that they did not at all prepare us to teach at this level”.*

What is more, she expressed deep resentment about the attitude of her tutors from teachers training college towards methods of teaching used in young learners' classroom. She stated the following:

*“my lecturers said that young learners module is a waste of time for students of English philology. Teaching young learners is singing songs, playing games and having fun, and that is why main classroom teachers could be involved in teaching English in that age group. For graduates of English philology it means lowering its status”*

Agnieszka studied at a teachers' training college that offered a module on young learners, however, she saw big discrepancies between standards of teaching older and younger learners of English:

*“I must say that especially young learners module was especially poorly designed. Tutor had no practical experience in teaching young kids, he only gave us facts about the design of syllabus and different techniques such as games, songs, rhymes. But it all was very theoretical because when I asked him about any practical tips he referred me to the books. Also what really annoyed me was the fact that the tutor praised all the tasks we created, he did not tell us what can be improved”.*



A second theme that arose from analysis of teachers' stories on their training in teachers training college is difficult access to students' apprentices in lower primary schools.

Marta for example described difficulties she experienced when looking for a placement in a lower primary school:

*"I wanted to give a try and see how the teaching in young learners classroom looks like but I was told that all the vacancies for students were taken by public universities students. The Ministry she told me have required them to take the students from public universities as a result they do not have place for private universities. I consider it as non-fair attitude".*

Wiktoria had a chance to take a placement in the lower primary classroom, however, in contrast with students from public universities she "was appointed to the worst teacher in the whole school". Her biggest regret was that the English language teacher she was appointed with used methods of teaching that were not in accordance with the latest standards.

*"I was so frustrated with the attitude presented by the teacher in lower primary school I knew that as a teacher of very young learners I should not only teach them language but develop their personality. I knew one thing my way of teaching should be different than was I saw during students practices"*

Wiktoria shed a light on possible explanation why students of private English language philology are treated unfairly in contrast with students of public institutions:

*"I realised then that it is not the fault of head teachers but the Ministry who choose few schools for students' apprentices and give more money for each teacher who takes students from public university".*

The teachers mentioned that TEYL teachers are treated unfairly as access to CPD is taken into consideration. They ,for example, do not receive support in gaining access to various forms of CPD for young learners teachers. Krystyna expressed dissatisfaction that the Ministry did not support her in expanding her language and methodological knowledge. Although the Ministry encouraged Russian language teachers to change their qualifications, she did not receive any support:

“The Ministry left everything in hands of teachers. As I told you I had to organize language training for Cambridge exam myself and I also had to organize professional training myself”. According to her account she was neither provided support in expanding her proficiency in English language nor knowledge in methods of teaching for young learners: “I regularly pay taxes in this country and now I am responsible for professional development”.

What is more, Marta showed her concerns about the educational resources available at a school library.

*“It is a pity that the Ministry does not equip the school libraries or teachers libraries with essential books. I think that it will be most helpful for teachers. I must say English language teachers are the most harmed one in comparison to other teachers, as the English language books are much more expensive than other books that is why we should receive help”.*

Teachers also suggest that the Ministry of Education left CPD for young learners in hands of outside companies such as IATEFL Poland and PASE. For these companies, financial benefits are more important than teachers' benefits. Therefore, they encourage TEYL teachers to become members of one of the organizations for various benefits like free workshops. For example, Wiktoria stated the following:

*“I knew from my friends' stories that training for teachers organized by outside companies are not a good option as they often only advertise their own materials and the workshops are only for teachers who wish to purchase their materials. I also heard that these workshops are not very valuable to teachers as they often rely on materials written by one publisher”.*

Emma also raised the same concern:

*“ These organizations make big fuss out of training. They advertised their CPD and told teachers to sign to these organizations for free training. I found one workshop by main teachers training center. It supposed to be great as teachers had a chance to learn how to introduce knowledge from different school subjects to primary English language classroom. Of course, first thing I did was to sign for it, however, there was no place for me. I was deeply disappointed I realized that we as English language teachers in primary schools are not treated equally with teachers who work in secondary school”.*

Furthermore, as Krystyna claimed the external companies presented chauvinist attitude to English language teachers.

*“I tried many British Council, PASE, ORE, but these organizations had one day workshops which were very expensive so I could not afford them. What really annoys me that for example IATEFL organizes annual conferences for English language teachers, only one or two 30 minutes workshops were for young learners teachers and we have to pay regular price”.*

To further exemplify the issue of unfair treatment of young learners teachers Krystyna added that the cost of CPD is very high in relation to teachers' salary:

*“Besides how can we teachers afford such expensive workshops. In contrast with other English language teachers we do not have a chance for additional classes, therefore in my opinion it is not fair to require to pay full price for professional development”.*

It seemed that although teachers organizations require young learners teachers to pay full price for professional development, they do not provide teachers with the same benefits. Krystyna provided the following comment:

*“What really annoys me that for example IATEFL organizes annual conferences for English language teachers, only one or two 30 minutes workshops were for young learners teachers and we have to pay regular price”*

4.2.2 Meso factors- Poor channels of communication with the head teachers and other teachers from their community of practice

In this subchapter, I included teachers' accounts on meso factors that lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment. In here, meso factors refer to two issues that are closely related to their everyday activities in a school: their professional autonomy in a classroom and collaboration with other members of their teachers' community.

#### *Not taking into consideration teachers' beliefs*

Teachers felt that the head teachers did not respect the knowledge they gained in studies and previous work places. Marta, for example, complained that head teacher did not believe in the value of education gained in a private university. She claimed:

*"I was told thousands times by my head teacher that I got this job because of my aunt's backing and she had to reject almost 25 applications from public colleges and universities. These people in her opinion for sure had better qualifications. Having this in mind I was appointed with senior teachers whose role was officially to assist me in finding proper teaching method but in reality she was there to criticize every idea I had"*

According to Marta, the head teacher ignored a fact that although she did not learn about young learners methods of teaching, her knowledge on methods of teaching used in ELT is quite solid. Therefore, she was frustrated when a mentor teacher she was appointed with had the following attitude:

*"She (mentor teacher) told me that my lesson would be observed every month and report would be sent to the head teacher. In the meantime I was invited to one of her lesson. She also told me she is too busy with her own work as primary school teacher and English language teacher and the best source of information is the teacher book. The mentor teacher told me that I do not have knowledge of young learners so she recommended me to strictly follow the lessons plans from the teachers' book and not to experiment with different methods I was very depressed after this talk I did not know if I would manage this change. You know I think that I was given a worst teacher was done on purpose to humiliate me".*

Her head teacher did not take into consideration a fact that she graduated from Applied Linguistic Department from the University in Warsaw and then from

very demanding and time consuming CELTA course, which prepared her to teach English in variety of classrooms. What is more, a head teacher did not take into account her previous employment in the most prestigious English language schools in Warsaw, and her vast experience in AFL techniques. A head teacher told her and her colleagues how the AFL should be introduced to an English language classroom. According to Emma, this method will be not successful when teachers do not learn to be active members of a school community. She stated the following:

*“I was lost. You know I think that my colleagues thought in the same way. How we can introduce AFL in the school and in the same way not be active in school. Our voice is not listened to we are only the one who are told what to do. The experts from teachers assessment office told us specifically how to introduce AFL into English language classroom and what is worse the head teacher also ignored our voice in discussion how to successfully change school. In my opinion I we needed to build a new way of assessment which involved all teachers. We also needed to come together with all the teachers and experts and decided together as equals about new ways of assessment”.*

Krystyna also complained that her qualifications as Russian language teacher were not considered as useful for a head teacher. She felt offended by the words of the head teacher during one of the first teachers meeting:

*“ We must forget about our old teaching habits and be innovative. When she was telling this she was looking directly at me. I was considered the teacher who should be told what to do as I was trained to be a teacher in the old system. I felt very frustrated. She did not understand that I used creative methods of teaching and elements of AFL in previous jobs I had in my professional life”*

Krystyna has more extensive experience in teaching, and she proved to have both theoretical background and practical experience that allow her to teach young learners. The head teacher knows that her qualifications are lower, however, she did not want to admit the truth, as she did not want to lose her authority. Krystyna provided an example when a decision of the head teacher would have negative consequences for the children's development, however, her voice was ignored:

*"I thought that some of the aspect of the assessment are not suitable for mixed ability classroom. Fortunately, the tutors from the platform told us again and again we must develop critical thinking. So we did it. For example, the teachers assessment agency advised us that pupils should be engaged in learning process. At the beginning of the lesson they are asked a question: What I am I going to learn today. The teacher presents the pupils with set of statements, for example can you name five toys in English. Then the students ask themselves if they know the answer. I am not convinced that this method works in mixed ability classes. When I tried to introduce this method it was a disaster. Half of the children know the answers for almost all the questions, other half did not. The stronger children asked me later what is the point of learning things that are already known. I wanted to introduce the idea later during the year when the differences between students are smaller. However, this was not met with approval of the head teacher. Simply as I told you she did not believe that we teachers have competencies in teaching."*

#### ***Not taking into consideration the recommendations of the Ministry and the centres of teachers professional development***

Emma and Marta's school was inspected by the consultants from the teacher professional development centre due to poor tests results after the third grade. The consultants from the centre recommended investment in educational resources for children. Because they knew that the head teacher is not a specialist in young learners teaching, they recommended consultation with teachers. Emma admitted the ignorance of the head teacher towards the recommendations of teachers assessment office: .

*"The head teacher however did not listen to experts from teachers' professional development centers, who suggested that improvement of poor quality of educational resources mean buying readers for children, resource for art and craft. However The head teacher in our school strongly believed that the young learners classroom needs to look modern from the first look, so the parents can see the improvements".*

Marta also added the following comment:

*"The head teacher made a big mistake not to listen to the words of the consultants. It would be far more better if we would buy more copies of graded readers for each child or more equipment for art and crafts activities".*

In addition, the head teacher ignored the opinion of teachers professional development centres to instruct parents on the educational reform. In their view, only well informed parents will cooperate with teachers in the teaching process. She stated the following:

*“Well, I think that the parents were not accustomed to the reform and that is why problems arise. The people from teachers’ assessment office told us thousands of time to inform parents of expectations of new reform But the head teacher did not bother to do this”.*

Krystyna and Agnieszka were employed in a school where the head teacher had ambitious plans to reform the lower primary classroom. She wanted to improve school position in the school rankings, therefore, she forced the teachers to implement creative methods of teaching and AFL in one school year. Agnieszka who was initially an enthusiast of modernizing school complained:

*“ Modernizing school is important, but it should be step by step process not a sudden and quick approach. I know that the head teacher do not listen to us teachers but I think in teachers assessment centre there work specialist whose advice to introduce some elements slowly needs to be listened to”*

#### ***Lack of cooperation between teachers***

All my participants had positive experiences with relationship with colleagues from previous posts. They hoped that in recent posts the situations would be the same. Emma made the following comment:

*“It was very difficult for me. During CELTA course and my work in private schools I was used to the fact that we helped each other. We shared different materials and knew that in time of crisis I could talk to them and sought help. I was extremely surprised that in here teachers did not care about anything. They simply wanted to go home after the lessons and in the breaks between the lessons were very busy”*

Probably lack of cooperation between teachers was caused by a visit of consultants from teachers' assessment centers.

"I think that lack of cooperation was caused by nervous atmosphere at the beginning school year. Teachers felt nervous also due to visit of employee from teacher's assessment agency". (Marta)

Both Krystyna and Agnieszka described conflict in their learning community. Krystyna expressed her dissatisfaction with the relationship with colleagues in her community. In her previous jobs she was used to the culture of discussion among teachers: "When there was a problem in school or new methods of teaching were to be introduced we kept together and discussed things"

During her professional career she was used to a fact that voices of more experienced teachers are heard and taken into consideration, therefore, she raised the following concerns:

*"Now I know that some of them agree with me on the choice of course book and AFL but they are afraid to state their opinion".*

Krystyna mentioned two reasons why teachers are afraid to be involved in discussion on the educational reform in young learners classroom. Firstly, the teachers knew that head teacher openly criticized Krystyna's methods of teaching, therefore

*"they were afraid they would be punished if they contacted me. The other teachers were afraid of me. They had families, bank loans so they were very afraid to lose their job. I know that teachers agree that I have a right in certain issues like the choice of course books. However, they were worried that if they disagree with the head teacher they would lose their position".*

Secondly, Krystyna blame the "old system of education where the head master was always right".

Agnieszka mentioned two reasons for tense atmosphere in teachers community. Firstly, negative attitude to cooperation is caused by fear of unknown. Ag-



nieszka who was initially enthusiastic towards the chance to transform the young learners classroom she described her first experience with the teachers as traumatic.

*“I observed that especially older teachers did not feel like changing their methods of teaching and the way their function in society. They were used to the fact that their methods of teaching were questioned especially by novice teacher. When the head teacher introduced me as an expert in creative methods of teaching I saw all faces angrily looking at me”.*

Secondly, the tense situations in teachers community is caused by a lack of leadership in teachers' community.

*“Some teachers especially Krystyna has extremely high esteem and her extensive experience should be taken into consideration. Her conflict with a head teacher causes big problems in school. Now the teacher is in really bad mood so we are afraid to ask questions”.*

#### 4.2.3 Micro factors- Low status of young learners English language teacher

In this section, I included teachers' accounts on micro factors that lead to their feelings of disempowerment/ empowerment. In here the micro factors are referred to life histories that have impact on their professional identity as well as their attitudes and values borne out of their experiences. Carr (2000).

Teachers' fear of employment in young learners' classroom is caused by negative experiences with the methods of teaching they gained in childhood and previous workplaces.

The necessity to get used to methods of teaching used in lower primary classrooms was especially difficult for those teachers who had negative experiences as a learner of English. Marta had negative experience as a learner of English as a second language in a lower primary school:

*"I have never wanted to teach at this level. I will always remember my English teacher from private language school when I started to learn English for the first time in the first or second grade of primary school. I cannot recall that I learned something, maybe one or two songs. The teacher was actually very nice but I had an impression that her job was only to sing songs and discipline the children. I thought that only from the fourth grade of primary school start regular and real learning".*

Her positive experiences with learning English began in higher grades of primary school when she "started to learn English vocabulary and grammar". Her interests in learning a new language was so intense she wanted to share this love to English with the learners. When she received a job in lower primary school she started to panic that she would have to use the methods of teaching that proved to be ineffective. She claimed the following:

*"I was really scared when I heard that my aunt helped me to get the job in lower primary classroom. I knew that I would have to play silly games, sing songs and make paper masks and puppets for theatrical plays. I am not convinced that these methods are useful for learning language. They are there mainly for amusement and fun".*

For Emma, the examples of ineffective methods of teaching used in lower primary classroom were different. For her the lack of positive results in teaching young learners is the use of course book and other ready-made materials in the classroom. She claimed that lessons based on course book and other ready-made materials are not adjusted to the development of a pupil age 6-10. Emma stated the following:

*"teaching mainly means filling pages in the activity books and developing listening skills. No wonder the pupils did badly in exams. I still remember that to our language school there came parents of children who after third grade realized that their children need further language lessons as teachers complain that their level of English is not satisfactory. When I received the post of English language teacher I had a dream that my lessons would look differently and more interesting. I think that course books are not a good methods of teaching to be used in the classroom. You know children are so curious and show interest in so many things and it is not*

*fair that they are forced to sit quietly and do activities from the book”.*

Agnieszka also added that the low status of English language teachers for young learners is caused by a fact that teachers too often use course book. Teachers, in her opinion, do not show initiative and think about different methods of teaching that suit the young learners needs. She harshly assesses such practices by saying:

*“I do not understand such teachers who only rely on course books in kids’ classroom. It is the best time when teachers do not feel pressure to get pupils ready for exams. They are only lazy, terrible lazy”.*

The teachers fear of being employed in young learners classroom is caused by an opinion that young learners teachers have lower authority than teachers of older pupils. Some of the teachers regarded lower proficiency in English as a symbol of lower authority. When Krystyna was offered a job in young learners’ classroom she visualised it as losing the authority. She claimed:

*“For a long time when I was Russian language teacher I observed that only less competent teachers were employed in young learners classroom, especially those who did poorly in exams”*

Wiktoria, on the other, hand claimed that low authority of young learners teachers is caused by a fact that they do not want to develop their methodological competencies. She was the only teacher who had a privilege of participating in a module for teachers of young learners. Although the course instructors in Wiktoria’s opinion introduced innovative ideas that suited the needs of young learners, she did not have a chance to try these innovative ideas in practice.

*“ During students’ apprentices I had contact with elderly lady who was teaching children in the first grade. It seemed to me that this woman did not want to learn something about new methods of teaching. She used the methods she remembered from her childhood. The children were asked to sit quietly at their desks. I had an impression that if they dare to move they will be punished like in Dicken’s movies. This experience put me off to teaching for a long*

*time. I was worried that in school I would have contact with teachers who do not wish to learn about humanistic methods of teaching”*

What is more, teachers seem to suggest that TEYL teachers do not have authority among parents. For example, Krystyna reported on how her colleague from the lower primary school is treated unfairly by the parents who do not treat her methods of teaching seriously. As she claimed:

*“ Those parents who are well off and have good and well paid jobs often visit her classroom and say that the English lessons are the waste of time for the children. As she told them that in the same classroom there are children with different language abilities, she was accused of lack of teaching competencies”*

Furthermore, teachers employed in young learners’ classroom have less financial stability than other English language teachers. Marta, for example was deeply worried that as a lower primary teacher will have less opportunities in finding additional employment:

*“I feared that as lower primary teacher it would not be possible to find job in private language schools or private tutorials. During conversation with my colleagues I knew that only graduates of secondary school have a chance of part-time jobs”*

Krystyna also reported that teachers have limited number of working hours that does not guarantee financial stability:

*“ I was offered only 9 hours in English language classroom, regular English language teacher have 18 hours in a classroom. I wondered how I would survive financially”*

#### **4.3 Different strategies teachers use to feel empowered**

Taking a position of English teacher in lower primary school was a traumatic experience for all my participants. It meant adjustment to new teaching methods, losing high professional status of being an English language teacher employed in a secondary school, difficult communication with the Ministry of Education and Teachers Assessment Centre, head teachers and other teachers. In order to maintain a feeling of professional well-being and to feel empowered all

participants mentioned how they referred back to significant people and events in their life histories which had had a positive influence on their professional identity. The teachers identified the following strategies to feel empowered:

- Referring to role models
- Seeking support from family members and colleagues

#### 4.3.1 Referring to role models

All of my participants mentioned the strong influence of teachers throughout their teaching career. Teachers' responses show that they often referred to those teaching styles that are in accordance with their beliefs and lead to their feelings of empowerment. Agnieszka rightly explained why the teachers referred to other teachers examples.

*"I think that I as a novice teacher I need a teacher model who I can learn from. Teacher model can also have another beneficial effect as by looking back at how teachers behaved in certain situations and what methods of teaching they used I feel reassured that if they could have done it I can do it".*

Several teachers referred to teaching styles which are in accordance with their beliefs. As novice teachers, they sought a teacher model from the childhood, teachers apprentices that serve as a standard of behaviour in a classroom. Agnieszka referred to an example of English language teacher in lower primary school in the US. The teacher firmly believed in humanistic approach to teaching young children. Agnieszka stated that her example helped her to make a decision to take employment in young learners' classroom. Agnieszka strongly believed that by using the teaching methods she observed in the US school she would be able to change young learners' classroom in Polish context.

*"I was amazed how humanistic approach to teaching is successful in teaching young learners. The wonderful teacher who I met in the US treated children in individualistic way not as a group. I remembered from my childhood that the teacher paid attention only to weak pupils with problems, other pupils were left alone. No wonder the children were not successful in learning. I have seen that this teacher was respected among other teachers and parents. That is why I chose the teacher to be my model of behaviour in the classroom".*

In Emma's case, referring to an example of a teacher from a secondary school helped her to make a decision to take an employment in young learners' classroom.

*"Sabina, my best beloved teacher from secondary school focused on pupils' strengths and not on weaknesses. She always used to say : You can do it and devote her time after lesson to help pupils understand difficult issues. One thing was that we were not ashamed to ask for help as we were not blamed for lack of knowledge. I was convinced then that I should follow her footsteps in my career as a young learners teacher"*

Later in her interview Emma mentioned that although many years have passed still she stays in contact with the teacher. She still feels that she cannot disappoint her beloved teacher and still asks herself a question: Will my teacher be satisfied with the lesson I conducted? How can I improve my relationship with my pupils?

Wiktoria also showed a teachers' example who influenced her decision to seek an employment in young learners' classroom. However, in contrast with Emma and Agnieszka, she mentioned two negative teachers examples: one from the childhood and one from teachers apprentices that in her opinion were not acceptable. She mentioned the following example:

*"I was so frustrated with the attitude presented by the teacher in lower primary school. The children prepared Cinderella play for children from other groups. Several children who in opinion of a teacher are weaker, who do not pronounce words correctly were not invited to take part in a play. I was so sorry for those children, who really wanted to be praised".*

She instinctively knew that this behaviour cannot be tolerated, as negative patterns gained in the childhood are very strong and are likely to influence their further learning. Because she saw a considerable gap between theoretical knowledge gained during studies and a reality in Polish classrooms and did not meet a teacher who decided to introduce learner's friendly approach to teaching she decided not to take a post in lower primary school. She claimed the following:

*"I firmly believed in learner's friendly approach to teaching as I became familiar with this approach in young learners' module but nei-*

*ther of the teachers who I met in school followed this approach. I was afraid that as I had no positive examples from the teachers I would behave the same as them and would do harm”*

However later, she realized that observation of teachers’ negative behaviour was a turning point in her professional career. She knew that instead of being passive follower of other teachers’ behaviour, she needs to modify her behaviours according to her beliefs and pupils’ needs.

It should also be stated that my participants refer to teachers role models to seek inspiration for teaching in young learners’ classroom.

Marta for example acknowledged her teacher from secondary school was a source for inspiration for using AFL techniques in her classroom. This had beneficial effect for her well- being:

*“I felt better when I realised that one of the teachers used AFL in her classroom. I remembered that she introduced this technique step by step. Now I remembered her words: Ideally such method should be introduced from the first grade of primary school. When the students are older they have problems with adjusting to new rules. I felt better when I remembered these words as I knew that this method is beneficial to pupils”*

Krystyna who had limited experience in teaching young learners was trying to seek a teacher who would be able to see insights of young learners methodology.

*“It was Justyna who showed me the value of theatrical plays in young learners classroom. I used this method in Russian classroom but I worried that I would have problems with teaching the text of the play. Justyna was fantastic and creative teacher who encouraged pupils to add their ideas to a text of a play. Justyna equipped me with new ideas which I can used in my classroom. I felt more confident”.*

Agnieszka, on the other hand, pointed to an English language teacher from primary school in the US for practical tips on teaching young learners.

*“ In a time of crisis especially at the beginning of the school year I often recalled how the teacher from US school conducted the lesson. She did not simply pass the knowledge to children but allowed them to experiment with new ideas. What strikes me the most were*

*the methods of teaching: making posters, constructing board games. Every time when I recalled the methods of teaching done by this teacher I felt confident then that the reform of Polish school makes sense”*

#### 4.3.2 Seeking support from family members and colleagues

Making a transfer from a secondary and private sector to lower primary sector is considered to be traumatic experience. Therefore, the teachers seek emotional support from family members and colleagues.

Marta, had problems with finding a steady job after graduation, therefore she asked her aunt for backing. When she was offered a position of young learners’ teacher she was disappointed, however, later she listed two advantages of her aunts’ support.

*“You know at first I was scared when I took the offer from lower primary teacher. You know new methods of teaching, but later I found out how lucky I was for various reasons. Firstly, I got a steady job with health and social insurance. Secondly, I gained determination that although I did not have proper qualifications I would do my best and not disappoint my aunt and the head teacher”.*

Krystyna also was seeking assistance from her family members. When Russian language lost its status, and she had to expand her qualifications she received help from her family members.

*“ I did not know how I would cope with losing my job as Russian teacher without my family. They strongly advised me not to give up and expand my qualifications. Later, when my English was not appreciated they reassured me that I received a certificate so I have qualifications to become an English language teacher”.*

She also noted that the family members were a source of help when she was offered a position of young learners’ teachers.

*“ They gave me inner strength not to give up, try out different strategies to survive the challenges. They also told me that as I grew up in teachers; family my identity is very strong so I survive even the most difficult moments.”*



Teachers did not seek support only from family members, but also from their colleagues. Emma enrolled in Celta diploma which would prepare her for teaching career. From the initiative of the tutors from the course Yahoo discussion group was created. At the beginning, the aim of the group was to give advice regarded written assignments. To her astonishment, the group became cohesive after the course. Emma mentioned that the main reason for existence of the group is willingness of teachers collaboration.

*“ When I heard about the reform in young learners classroom I was really frightened at first. I was especially scared about the implementation of AFL I was not sure how I should introduce some elements of AFL: like self -assessment for example. I was not sure how I was going to ask my young kids to assess their work and then told them I see things differently. My colleagues from discussion group were very helpful then, they not only supported me emotionally but also gave me interesting articles that I can used”*

Marta, who is employed in the same institution as Emma also benefitted from her colleague support.

*“I do not know how miserable my first days in school would look like without Emma’s help. She provided me with useful assistance how to introduce different methods of teaching, how to deal with difficult behaviour of children”*

Marta remarked that Emma taught her the importance of building healthy collaborative culture in school.

*“ I learned that in a time of crises I can receive help from her but that my knowledge can also be beneficial. Emma also asked me for help in critical moments. We often met after school to discuss our dilemmas. She said to me I ask for your opinion as I believe that every opinion can give new and fresh insights to your problem. I became so proud that Emma experienced teacher valued my opinion”*

Wiktorina also benefited from healthy collaborative school culture. She was offered a post of young learners teacher after long maternity leave. She had mixed feelings associated with acceptance of new post in young learners’ classroom. On the one hand, she was glad she finally had a steady profession that guaranteed financial stability of her family. On the other hand, she was afraid not to disappoint the head teacher.

*“When I took the position I still remembered my traumatic experience from students apprentices, I was afraid that I would be left alone with all my worries”*

To her astonishment, she came across teachers' community that was very supportive. She especially praised an attitude of the head teacher who did not openly criticized all the mistakes teachers made but tried to provide assistance. It was her idea to organize meeting with a psychologist who dissipated some of her doubts about for example AFL

*“We had a meeting with a school psychologist who told us that indeed maybe the children at this very young age are not ready to assess the progress but it is a role of other pupils to help the pupil to be successful. Everything seemed to sound fine at least I know that this method will not do harm to children. I think that if a person understands the reasons for change he or she is more engaged with it”*

What is more, she also is satisfied with the support given by other teachers. She also emphasized the strong collaborative culture among teachers which is not present in other teachers' accounts.

*“ I could not imagine that other teachers can be so helpful and supportive. I heard horror stories from my friends that teachers only envy others that they are competitive. In my school is completely different. I give you one example: We discussed what to do so every teacher has access to latest methodological publications. We agreed that one teacher borrows a book and then refer its content to others”*

Wiktorina was so thankful for the support given by the colleagues from school that she was deeply worried that her participation in the online program in teachers professional development negatively influence her contacts with colleagues.

*“ I really feared that somehow our good relationship between teachers will not be possible. I feared that the teachers would be jealous. I even had grudges to the head master that he chose me instead of others”*

However, soon she realised that by being able to share new ideas with her colleagues, she would feel more competent teacher who has equal status in the community.

*“ I realised that I would gain more knowledge and in this way I would pay the tribute to the teachers for help I received”.*

#### **4.4 The role of the online program for teachers' professional development in helping teachers to feel empowered**

The teachers received an invitation to participate in the online program at the end of September. It was a time they experienced stress and panic associated with the implementation of the educational reform. Participation in the program according to the organizers from the Main Centre of Teachers professional development would help the teachers to relieve discomfort associated with the reform. The teachers who were interviewed listed the following reasons why the platform helped them to feel empowered:

- Having access to knowledge on young learners methodology
- Gaining critical skills
- Recognising importance of collaboration between teachers

##### **4.4.1 Having access to knowledge on young learners methodology**

The teachers experienced stress and panic associated with the implementation of the educational reform. Poor knowledge on young learners methodology, poor communication with the Ministry of Education, the Teachers Assessment agency and teachers from school community led to teachers' feelings of disempowerment. Although initially teachers had mixed feelings associated with participation in the online platform for teachers professional development, they welcomed the online platform for teachers professional development as the opportunity to expand their knowledge on young learners methodology and in this way feel empowered. As Marta rightly claimed:

*“Of course I was frightened at first. I was afraid that I would not manage to deal with so many different tasks: preparing lessons plans, preparing teaching materials and participating in the online*

platform for teachers professional development. Later however I realised that It is possibility to gain new methodological knowledge”

Indeed, all the teachers claimed that the knowledge they received in the platform directly influenced their teaching practice.

Firstly, a wide range of activities they were involved in helped them to gain practical ideas. In each module they had, they were involved in variety of activities that involve lectures, discussions with experts, group activities where they plan their lessons and bank activities. Marta, for example, sees the benefits of an educational film about differences between 6 and 7 year old children.

*“This educational film they presented was really great. In my opinion it has two major advantages for my practice. Firstly I managed to see major differences between 6 and 7 year old children. I did not know that attention span of 6 year old children is 5 minutes and 7 year old children is 10 minutes. Thanks to the teacher from the film I knew how to assess children’s needs. Secondly, the film was a source of inspiration how to adjust teaching methods to the needs of both groups”*

The teachers are also enthusiastic towards possibility of participation in the online conferences with experts on young learners methodology. For Emma the discussion with experts alleviated her fears associated with 6 year old children in English language classroom.

*“I really appreciated the consultation we had with an expert. Now I know that it is normal that children in this age cry when they lose the game or the task is too difficult. She alleviated my fears that I do something wrong that I introduce competitive games into the classroom”*

It should be mentioned that my participants perceive discussions with their colleagues from the platform as a valuable tool in expanding their knowledge on young learners methodology. According to Marta, discussions with colleagues provided her with sensible solutions for the problems that occurred in the class-

room, but also valuable inspirations how to implement experts' advice into an English language classroom

*“ The advice from the experts were great and innovative, but I think that some of the ideas were not adjusted to the needs of pupils. For example, my pupils love musical activities but they are ashamed of singing in public. The experts suggested changing songs or chants to these which are more likely to arise interest of the pupils. However, my colleagues suggested very interesting activities which on the one hand are interesting for the children and on the other hand are designed for big classes. It was very helpful”.*

It should be mentioned that the knowledge gained in the platform raised their confidence as competent teachers.

For example, Marta who felt embarrassed that her knowledge is an imitation in her teaching practice. In this way, she was afraid not to disappoint her aunt and the head teacher who gave her the opportunity to work in the school.

*“ Without knowledge on how to teach young kids I lacked confidence I felt like outsider who cannot benefited the school. I felt that thanks to the organizers I gained confidence that I am worth something”*

The issue of gaining confidence was echoed by other participants who provided several examples that they were able to support their community.

Wiktorina admitted that her confidence as a teacher raised significantly when she realized that she can support the members of her school community.

*“ So far I was a beneficent as I received help from my colleagues from school. The program enabled me to gain knowledge which I can share with my colleagues. My colleagues were grateful when I explained how to introduce the idea of AFL to parents.”*

#### 4.4.2 Gaining critical skills

Participation in the online platform helped teachers to develop their critical skills. The teachers were pleased that the participation in the program raised their awareness of the need to critically assess any ready materials and have autonomy in a classroom (meso factors). Emma, for example, praised the organizers of the platform for organization of each module of the program. In her opinion the organization of each module enabled the teachers to critically assess the knowledge she received during different parts of the platform, their previous teaching experiences and her pupils needs. She made a following comment:

“At first we had lectures, read different articles, watch films and then during preparing bank activities in small groups and further discussion we were able to think critically if our activities are in accordance to our pupils and our teaching preferences”

Emma added the following comment:

*“ Discussions with colleagues after group presentations were very valuable to me. After we presented our activities we had discussion with other colleagues. They provoked us to think critically about different options, ask questions. It was great experience”.*

Teachers learned that they could not only rely on ready materials but also on their previous teaching experiences. For example, Marta claimed that the idea of involving pupils in making masks or decorations for theatrical plays which was proposed by the experts in a platform did not stay in accordance with her teaching experiences and the needs of her pupils.

*“ In Polish reality older and more experienced teachers and experts always have a right. In this platform we had unique chance to learn reflection skills. I will give you an example : We have been told numerous times that children should make decorations for theatrical play as in this way they will be more motivated to learn. My experience shows the opposite. Even when I worked in private language school I learned never to ask my pupils to do art work at home, as I knew that 80% of pupils would not do it. On the other hand, for me, and parents doing cuts ups in a classroom is a waste of time. I proposed that instead of doing cuts ups, the children do painting projects on a large piece of paper. Together with my partner we proposed an activity which in our opinion is better for children.”*

Krystyna, on the other hand, was sceptical about the suggestion to engage pupils from the first grade of primary school in the learning process.

*“The experts from the agency asked the teachers to ask a question : “What I am going to learn today? The teacher presents the pupils with a set of statements , for example can you name five toys in English. Then the pupils ask themselves if they know the answer. I am not convinced that this method works in mixed ability classes. When I tried to introduce this method it was a disaster. Half of the children knew the answer for almost all questions, half did not. The stronger children asked me later what is the point of learning things we already know. I wanted to introduce the idea later when the differences between pupils are smaller, however, this was not met with approval of the head teacher”*

Krystyna who is proud of her extensive methodological knowledge is astonished of the fact that other teachers do not appreciate her knowledge and do not have willingness to critically assess the decisions of the experts. She mentioned the following

*“The attitude of the teachers were at first hopeless. At first they believed the head teachers, now the experts. However, during doing bank activities and discussions with other teachers they realized that they need to reevaluate their teaching methods”.*

Later, she noticed that teachers developed awareness of critical assessment of different teaching practices. Krystyna made the following statement:

*“I think that teachers’ attitude to thinking about teaching changed dramatically after the presentation we made on the platform. The presentation was about movement activities which are suited to the needs of our classroom. Of course the activities were different than those present in the teachers books. These suggestions were met with enthusiasm of other teachers. Later we heard that they used in their classroom. This accident I believed motivated the teachers for harder work to critically evaluate any teaching materials.*

It should be noted that participation in the online platform helped teachers to assess their future learning needs. Initially, they tried to depend only on training provided by the online platform for teachers professional development. Later however, when their activities progressed, they developed more critical ap-

proach to learning. Emma provided valuable account which explained why teachers sought other learning opportunities.

*“Discussions with experts and colleagues convinced me that every teacher need to search different sources and learn how to analyse different materials. We have been encouraged to do this. We have been told numerous times that our identity as teacher will be strengthened when we try to learn actively, think about different options”.*

Agnieszka also provided the reasons why she decided not to depend only on the platform as a main source of knowledge.

*“ After initial enthusiasm I realized that some important issues were only tackled by the organizers. For example, we had a chance to watch a film on different alternative methods of teaching like: Montessori method, Dalton plan. At first I found it useless, and not applicable to a classroom full of 27 pupils. But then I tried to search internet sources on the internet and found out that some of elements from Montessori method can be useful. Together with my partner we tried to explore this issue further”.*

#### 4.4.3 Recognizing importance of collaboration between teachers

All the teachers stressed out that the platform improved their relationship with teachers with whom they cooperated during the program. Emma and Marta, on the one hand, were satisfied with the cooperation with teachers during the program. They eagerly participated in all the activities suggested by the coordinator of the program. They shared useful ideas and materials, however, Marta and Emma realize that when the program ends, the relationship with other teachers will not last. Therefore, they did not like to share everyday problems with the teachers. This attitude is shared by other teachers from the program who also were not eager to take part in a forum which role was to seek help in critical moments in a classroom. The major advantage of the program for Marta and Emma was strengthening of both professional and personal relationship with each- others. Involvement in different kinds of activities was a stimulus for their better relationship.

Marta also confirmed opinion of Emma. For her, the trust she received from Emma is important. So far she was only receiver of knowledge from Emma, in



this way she could repay for her kindness. When the relationship with teachers from the school is concerned it improved. Emma noticed that they understood that cooperation with all teachers is necessary to improve the practice:

*“When we make presentation on what we learned in the program the teachers were at first a little bit skeptical, still from many examples we provided that cooperation is needed especially with introduction of AFL”.*

Krystyna and Agnieszka noticed significant improvements in cooperation with teachers with whom they were involved in different activities:

*” I must say that in October we had major difficulties in working together, we did not agree what we put on poster, where we should meet, who is responsible for what. It was extremely tiring experience. Now it is completely different everything work like Swiss clocks. I think we all managed to understand that to achieve success we must cooperate”.*

Agnieszka added the following comment:

*“Learning atmosphere among teachers was great. Almost everybody with few exceptions met the deadline in posting materials on the web. What is more, I think that we managed to do something very valuable together which even strengthened even more our relationship”*

Agnieszka recalled that due to technical problems the module did not start until November. However, they were asked to make presentation on the creative methods they use in the classroom. The ideas they suggested were based on Agnieszka's ideas from her MA thesis and were met with enthusiasm with teachers from the platform.

However, they are both concerned that the positive atmosphere in their school will be long lasting. Krystyna for example made the following statement:

*“The program was great it encouraged us to cooperate with each other, reflect on each lesson, still I think that teachers in our school will not change. I have noticed in the program how they were not afraid to ask questions and discuss things. But this was without our head teachers presence. They are so afraid to keep the position so they will remain silent and do what the head teacher says.”*

Agnieszka added the following:

*“although I noticed slight improvements in functioning of our small community, but I am skeptical about the future. For example our problems with a course book are not resolved. We still have to work with materials I and our pupils hate for the whole school year. The participation in the platform strengthened our relationship only temporarily. When we return to our school it will be the same as always”.*

It should be noted that Agnieszka in contrast to Krystyna did not see the necessity to keep in touch with other participants of the program. She knew that these relationship would not be long lasting. Krystyna was of different opinion, she saw the need to have more personal contacts in the future.

*“I managed to establish more personal and professional contacts with three of the teachers. It would be so nice to meet each- others in real world in the future”.*

I think that this attitude was caused by the fact that she did not get along with the teachers from her school. The teachers from the program gave her support and informed her that her voice is really meaningful.

Wiktorja praises teachers eagerness to share different practical ideas and willingness to give advice in critical moments:

*“ We learned from each other a great deal. For example, one group of teachers introduced splendid idea of how to use e Twinning program as well as other programs sponsored by the European Union. We asked thousands of questions of how to make applications, how to find partners. The open discussion forum was always busy. I really benefited from this discussion and even asked the head teacher to apply to this program.”*

She was also very proud when the teachers from her school were a source of advice to other teachers form the platform:

*“Together with the teacher with whom I worked in the program talk to the head teacher and decided to make a video conference for the teachers how to make them cooperate on everyday basis. They were very happy and happy for the advice”*

## **4.5 Summary**

The chapter presented the findings of the research to answer the research questions. The analysis of data revealed certain issues that disempower teachers that are grouped into certain categories: poor channels of communication with the Ministry of Education, head teachers and their colleagues. In addition, the findings of the research show that teachers referred to various role models from their primary or secondary school to feel empowered. What is more, they sought support from the family members or colleagues from previous workplaces to help them deal effectively with the assumptions of the educational reform in young learners' classroom.

The findings of the research showed that TEYL teachers employed in lower primary classrooms see the following benefits of participation in the online platform for teacher professional development whose aim is to empower teachers: having access to knowledge on methods of teaching typical for young learners, gaining critical skills that enable teachers to critically assess different teaching materials and adjust them to their own teaching beliefs and the needs of pupils. The online platform helped teachers to maintain better communication with their colleagues from teachers' community.

## **5. Discussion of findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The aim of the study is to deepen the understanding of semi- specialists TEYL teachers professional self in a context of educational reform in Polish primary schools.

- 1) What factors contribute to semi- specialists TEYL teachers' feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment in a context of educational reform in young learners' classroom
- 2) What strategies do semi-specialist TEYL teachers use to feel empowered?
- 3) In what ways does participation in the online platform for teachers professional development help teachers to feel empowered?

Discussion of the findings will be organized around the research purpose, that is examining professional self of semi- specialist TEYL teachers. The professional self is shaped by different factors that impact on teachers' professional self in the context of the reform, drawing upon the three way distinction between macro (the politics of the Ministry), meso (capacity for autonomy in a classroom and collaboration with others) and micro factors (life histories) introduced in the chapter 2. The chapter is organized as follows. In the first section, I analyse macro, meso and micro factors that lead to teachers' feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment: teachers initial experiences with TEYL (micro factors), the status of TEYL as a profession and the politics of the Ministry (macro factors), capacity for autonomy and collaboration with others (meso factors). In this section I also analyse how supportive relationships with other teachers and family members (micro factors) and participation in the platform assisted teachers to feel empowered. The aim of the second section is to analyse what is the contribution of my study to understanding of TEYL teachers' professional self in the context of the reform.

The discussion will consider the findings in light of the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 and seek to account for these with reference to research studies.

## **5.2 Factors that contribute to participants' professional identity**

This section aims to analyse how macro, meso and micro factors influence the formation of professional self in a context of educational reform in a young learners classroom. How the teachers construct their professional self in a context of educational reform depend on the life histories of participants. Indeed as my theoretical framework in the chapter 2 shows, professional self is a unique synthesis of interactive relationships between language teachers' lives, their perception, and experiences from past and present events and social context.

The strongest contextual influences on the teachers' professional identity could be classified under the following categories: teachers' initial experiences with TEYL (micro factors), the status of TEYL as a profession (macro factors), the politics of the Ministry of Education (macro factors), capacity for autonomy in schools (meso factors), collaboration between teachers (meso factors), supportive relationships (micro factors), role of the online platform in teacher empowerment. As I will discuss further in the second part of this chapter, the experience of empowerment and disempowerment described in teachers' accounts is the result of the complex interplay between these factors, and in that part of the chapter, a discussion of what the data suggests about the ways these interrelate is discussed.

### **5.2.1 Teachers' initial experiences with TEYL – micro factors**

Firstly, initial values and beliefs on teaching young learners impact TEYL teachers' professional identity and lead to their feelings of disempowerment. Marta's, Krystyna's and Wiktoria's initial fear of being employed in young learners' classroom has its roots in their values and beliefs about teaching in young learners' classroom.

Marta had negative experience associated with methods of teaching used in a young learners' classroom. She regarded the methods as ineffective. Her experiences intensified during the studies at a private teacher training college, where she was convinced that by using methods of teaching suitable for young learners teachers lower their professional status.

Krystyna's negative beliefs have roots in her previous experiences as the Russian language teacher. She learned that only less competent teachers teach at pre-primary classroom. She feared that by getting employment in lower primary classroom she would be positioned as underqualified teacher.

Wiktoria, on the other hand, claimed that her scepticism of getting employed in lower primary classroom is associated with traumatic experiences she had at the student placement. A teacher from a primary school used methods of teaching that were not in accordance with humanistic approach which put her off to teaching. She worried that she would imitate the wrong behaviour of a teacher in her own classroom. Therefore, she did not like to take a position of a TEYL teacher. As it was shown in the theoretical framework, the micro factors play pivotal role in a formation of teachers' professional selves. As Duff (et al., 1997) claims, the decisions teachers take in their professional lives depend on their beliefs about teaching which are usually acquired during initial experiences with teaching.

#### 5.2.2 The status of TEYL as a profession- macro factors

The traumatic experiences teachers had with TEYL is caused by low status of TEYL profession, an issue that is present in the literature of teacher professionalism. Low status of TEYL teachers is caused by the disagreement of what is meant by a young learner of English language. Pinter(2006), for example, was one of the first scholars who established first criteria of a young learner of English as a second language. In her opinion, young learners mean children and teenagers from the age of three to thirteen or fourteen. Pinter's classification, on the one hand, raised awareness of the need to include very young learners from the age of three in the process of foreign language learning, however, this classification leads to confusion. A question arises, whether placing very young learners in the same group as teenagers means that the same methods of teaching can be used to teach 3 and 18 year old pupils.

The latest classification proposed by Ellis (2014) makes distinction between older and younger learners by distinguishing early years/ pre-primary group.

Ellis believes that by making this distinction focus will be placed on the importance of teaching English to very young learners, aged 3-10. Indeed, from this time there has been an increasing number of research that synthesize the knowledge of child's development and its influence on teaching and learning process. Still however, parents and other teachers treat TEYL field as the "lowest of the low profession". The teachers from my study as learners of English as a second language felt that the methods of teaching used in a young learners' classroom were ineffective. These opinions were also replicated by head teachers who assumed that teaching this age group means play and fun activities. No wonder, parents send their children to private language schools.

The low status of TEYL teachers is also caused by the lack of consensus on methods of teaching to be used in teaching young learners. I have noticed that the British Council Institute that set standards in teaching various age groups propose activities that are fun oriented, multisensory, context, topic based lessons. This approach however, has its drawbacks. Firstly, as Pinter (2006) rightly claimed, in classrooms with large groups of children using a course book leads to success of individual learners especially those who have problems with learning. It will be useful to the development of TEYL field to maintain strong cooperation with early years education departments. In this way debate on individual features in learning a language and their influence on the choice of methods of teaching. Consequently, the place of ELT for young learners in the academic world will be established.

An important issue that was raised by the teachers was an assumption that anyone with basic language proficiency can teach young learners. The teachers assumed that graduates of English language philology who have high language proficiency need to have a right to be employed in higher primary or secondary schools. Teaching young learners in their opinion should be reserved for home-room teachers. The findings of the study are confirmed in Guzman's (2010) report. The participants of her study also had initial fear of starting their teaching career in young learners classroom, as in their opinion teaching this age group is reserved for teachers who "knew English" (Guzman, 2010, p. 140). However, teachers managed to use their agency and managed to resist the negative beliefs about teaching they acquired in the past. By referring to examples of their

family members and teachers they managed to understand what values are important for them to feel empowered in their professional career. Thus, seeking position of ELT teacher was not a traumatic experience for them. Emma and Agnieszka from my study choose teaching in young learners' classroom despite the widespread rumours that TEYL is reserved for teachers who have limited proficiency in English. Agnieszka's reasons for seeking employment in young learners' classroom is positive example of US teacher. Her methods of teaching that were child centred applied to her vision of young learners' classroom and by taking a position of a teacher of young learners she hoped to change young learners' classroom. The findings of my research align with the study conducted by Lortie (1975). The teachers from her study choose teaching in young learners' classroom because of satisfaction and pleasure, or 'psychic rewards' (Lortie 1975)

### 5.2.3 The politics of the Ministry of Education-macro factors

The professional self of TEYL teacher is shaped by the politics of the Ministry of Education who is responsible for setting the qualifications, teacher training and planning the educational reform. Teachers feel disempowered by lack of recognition of their professional qualifications. For Marta, Krystyna and Wiktoria conflict with the Ministry over their professional qualifications was a source of disempowerment.

Marta mentioned that her professional qualifications as a graduate of private teacher training college were not recognized. She was told that her language proficiency and knowledge of different methods of teaching are too low to teach in a secondary school. Later, when she finally received a post in lower primary school she was told that they would better hire a graduate of special teacher training college for young learners, as the graduates of this institution have not only high level of proficiency in English language but also solid knowledge on methods of teaching for young learners.

Krystyna's professional qualifications were also questioned. She graduated from the Russian Philology and had extensive experience in teaching this language in both primary and secondary schools. After the Russian language lost



its status of the main language in the schools, she was told that she could seek a position in lower and higher grades of primary schools when she pass the Certificate of Advanced English issued by the Cambridge University. Two years later she was dismissed from her job, as only graduates of English teacher training college were given a right to teach in higher primary schools. Her level of frustration was very high, as she was informed that to keep her position she would better apply to teacher training college for English language college in any public university which had the reputation for high standards of teaching.

Wiktorja's qualifications obtained in private institution were not taking into consideration when she applied for a position in secondary school. She knew she could easily obtain a position of a TEYL teacher due to participation in a module devoted to TEYL. However, her application for a position of ELT teacher in higher primary school was refused, although she has qualifications for teaching all age groups.

Emma and Agnieszka did not feel their qualifications were marginalized. Emma and Agnieszka developed positive identity, when they noticed that their qualifications have been recognized. Even though they did not graduate from public teacher training college, they did not feel their status is low. Emma holds a CELTA diploma which is required for teachers of adult learners in private language schools, however, her qualifications were not an obstacle in seeking employment in lower primary schools. Agnieszka was not pleased with the knowledge she obtained during studies, however, her identity strengthened when she received a post in a lower primary classroom. In her opinion it is because of her interests in creative methods of teaching used in a lower primary classroom.

Indeed, for example Emma graduated from prestigious public university (translation), and CELTA program and found employment in well recognized language schools. The reason why she chose to be employed in public primary school was willingness to change young learners' classroom to the standards that exist in private language schools. In the interview, she mentioned that her job in a private language schools did not give her a chance to address her pro-

fessional needs, therefore, she regarded teaching in young learners' classroom as a chance for professional development.

The teachers who participated in the study argued that the other reasons for teacher marginality is the lack of information on educational reform in young learners classroom. The teachers did not know whether or not the educational reform will be implemented, which leads to a fact that neither schools nor teachers were prepared to the educational change in young learners classroom. The parents did not know whether the reform will be implemented so majority of parents send their children to pre- preparatory classes in kindergartens rather than to primary schools. Some parents postponed their decisions until the end of August. It means that the teachers did not receive the psychological diagnosis of each child who entered school. The lack of psychological diagnosis disempowered teachers, as they had problems to suit the methods of teaching to children's needs.

What is more, the teachers complained that the Ministry wrongly assessed the school needs before the implementation of the reform. The Ministry convinced parents that the main challenge that schools have to face is the limited resources. Emma claimed that the Ministry did not ask the teachers to assess their real needs, but ignored their voice and asked schools to purchase educational resources like chairs, desks, carpets. Emma added that if the voice of the teachers would be heard, the school would buy more graded readers, crayons and paper for art work.

The training teachers received during studies and CPD also influence a way in which identity is developed. The teachers claimed that they developed identity of failure as a result of poor access to initial training devoted to TEYL. Marta expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of TEYL modules in a curricula of a private teacher training college, limited access to student placement in a lower primary classroom and lack of access to support for TEYL teachers in a time of educational reform. In her opinion these factors lower her chances to be positioned as a teacher with high professional status. Krystyna put emphasis on little support for TEYL teachers who were previously employed as Russian language teacher. Limited access to free language courses lead to lowering her

status as TEYL teacher who is treated as a teacher whose proficiency in English is limited.

Agnieszka rightly noticed that modules devoted for TEYL teachers were poorly designed, which is a crucial factor in determining low professional status of TEYL teachers who in her opinion depend on ready materials and do not act as active agents in their classroom. Similarly Wiktoria's story shows that the student placement in lower primary classrooms was in many cases poorly designed which discourage many teachers to seek a job in a lower primary classroom.

Initial training for TEYL teachers was a source of disempowerment. Marta felt disempowered that her private teacher training college did not provide student teachers with a chance to participate in a separate module on methods of teaching for young learners. Limited knowledge on methods of teaching for young learners is included in the modules on ELT methods of teaching for all age groups. She mentioned that the reason of limited interest towards TEYL field is the negative attitude of tutors towards TEYL. In their opinion teaching young learners is associated with fun and play, therefore a graduate of any department could teach young learners. The ELT teachers who are involved in teaching young learners have lower status in tutors opinions. Marta assumed that by not providing teachers with the methods of teaching for young learners the tutors limit their chances in the job market.

Agnieszka, on the other hand, claimed that disempowerment was caused by poor design of young learners module. The tutors only provided students with a brief knowledge on specificity on teaching young learners and methods of teaching for this age group. However, they were not be able to provide students with practical tips in teaching young learners, as they also did not have any experience in teaching children.

The teachers also claimed that their disempowerment is caused by lack of opportunities for teachers' professional development. The public institutions that specialize in professional development offered only few workshops for TEYL teachers, however, the places for teachers is limited. The private institutions, on

the other hand, offered a few 30 minutes workshops during annual IATEFL Poland conferences. The teachers assumed that their feelings of disempowerment result not only from a limited access to professional development, but also unequal treatment of TEYL teachers regarding fees the teachers were expected to pay. The teachers were required to pay the same fee as other ELT teachers, although they had fewer chances for professional development.

The literature that looks at teachers' professionalism explores the issue of disempowerment of teachers. The certain factors that lead to marginalization of ELT teachers are the following : lack of job's security and lack of recognition from the Ministries of Education (Johnston, 1997), lack of access to professional development opportunities and opportunities for professional growth (de Gonzalez, 2009). The studies mentioned above showed how the politics affected their professional identity, their commitment and motivation ( Gillings de Gonzalez, 2009). The ELT teachers who participated in the study had little confidence in teaching as a result of the University politics, and negative prior experiences as ELT teachers. The findings of my research not only provide support for the findings of these research, but also contribute to the further understanding of how the politics of the Ministry empowers or disempowers TEYL teachers.

It seems that marginality of teachers is not only caused by different discourses , but more importantly by their sense of professional identity. As Giroux (1988) rightly claimed if teachers have a strong sense of their identity, they feel empowered. In contrast, those teachers who do not regard teaching as a life- long career and who do not have strong commitment to their career feel as professionally marginalized.

#### 5.2.4 Capacity for autonomy in schools- meso factors

The identity of TEYL teachers is developed by their capacity for autonomous decisions in a classroom. Marta, Emma and Krystyna assume that the lack of autonomy in the classroom is an impediment in development of teachers' professional identity. They claimed that they were not given permission to choose either a course book or teaching methods that are adjusted to the needs of pupils.

Wiktorja and Agnieszka's stories showed that having autonomy in a classroom results in development of positive identity and feelings of empowerment. In Agnieszka's case a head teacher knew she is an expert in creative methods of teaching and gives her autonomy in a classroom. Wiktorja was also encouraged by the Ministry to use the methods she was taught in a teacher training college. What is more, she could refer to the advice of psychologists on the most suitable methods for young learners. The teachers also discussed imbalanced relationship with the head teachers and teachers' assessment centres. This is due to imbalanced power relationships in teachers' communities. It should be claimed that power is imposed on teachers without taking into consideration teachers' beliefs and knowledge. The fact that teachers' knowledge, values and beliefs are invisible for those who are at the top of hierarchical system influence their professional identity.

The lack of ability to make autonomous decisions in the classroom cause uncertainty for teachers. They are aware of the fact that the Ministry, teachers' assessment centres have a right and power to adopt policies and programs without acknowledging of teachers beliefs, knowledge and values. Therefore, as Overton (2006) rightly claimed, teachers receive a clear message that they are not respected as professionals whose voice is not respected.

The teachers noticed that the power relations are judgemental in nature. The Ministry of Education, Teachers' Assessment centres and head teachers claim that the reasons for increased control in a classroom is a belief that it leads to increased productivity Bullough (2011, p. 16). He claimed the following:

When "valued for their productivity alone" authentic social relations... are replaced by "judgemental relations"... Judgemental relations enhance vulnerability and undermine trust by encouraging deceit.

Some teachers initially approved the decision of the Ministry to increase control over TEYL teachers. For example, Agnieszka had negative attitude to teaching in young learners' classroom before the reform. By comparing young learners' classrooms in the US and in Poland she realized that there is a need to reform Polish classrooms to the standards that exist in other countries. She assumed

that “Polish teachers are lazy, terribly lazy” and sceptical about new innovative methods of teaching, therefore they must be forced to introduce innovative methods.

Similarly, Marta tried to justify passive attitude of teachers in her school. The teachers to her astonishment did not protest that the specialists from teachers’ assessment centres visited the school and forced teachers to do paperwork. The teachers did not protest, as they associated the visit of the consultants with the anticipated changes in young learners’ classroom.

The literature on the impact of the lack of teachers’ autonomy on teachers’ professional identity shows that it has negatively impacted upon teachers’ professional identity and leads to increasing teacher stress, decline of teacher morale, and affecting their health and well-being (e.g. Moss, 2004; Wilkins, 2011). However, Liu’s research (et al., 2011) shows an example of ELT teacher who is employed in a Chinese University. She was granted with an opportunity to become ELT teacher at a Chinese University, on a condition she would apply the assumptions of liberal pedagogy which negatively influences her autonomy in a classroom. She claimed that lack of autonomy in young learners’ classroom would have a negative impact on her commitment to work, emotions and well-being. However, she used two kinds of agency strategies: stepping up and pushing back that helped her to gain some degree of autonomy in a classroom. On a one hand she tried to follow the assumptions of the liberal pedagogies, however, she ignored those elements of liberal pedagogies that did not stay in accordance with her beliefs about teaching.

The findings of Liu’s research align with the findings of my studies. On the one hand teachers assumed that lack of autonomy had negative impact on their professional life, as they feel that despite their efforts to change young learners’ classrooms their opinions are not respected. However, it seems that lack of autonomy has its positive effects on teachers. They used their agency and think about different methods to solve their problems. For example, Krystyna claimed that the lack of autonomy in choosing the course book for young learners led her to think about a new strategy. She used the course book that was chosen in the previous school year, however, instead of using stories, chants and songs

that were not adjusted to pupils needs and interests, she used language materials from other sources.

In addition, lack of autonomy can be regarded as coercive that is destructive for teachers' professional identity and teacher professionalism but also persuasive (Cribb et al., 2007). For some teachers lack of autonomy is beneficial (persuasive for their professional identity). Emma and Marta for example considered lack of autonomy as a chance to work collaboratively to get rid of external pressures. They assisted each other in critical moments that arose during the first days of implementation of educational reforms.

Similarly Wiktor's story provided useful example how teachers from her community of practice managed to find a balance between autonomy and power. Wiktor together with her more experienced colleagues used strategies that are bottom-up rather than top-down. As they knew that their knowledge on methods of teaching typical for young learners is limited, and they could not depend on professional development, they decided to apply different strategies. For example, they were searching different sources on methods of teaching for young learners and ideas to be used in mixed classroom. Then they were discussing these issues together and were thinking about how these methods and ideas can be implemented in their classrooms.

The Wiktor's story is an example that individual teachers also have a power to introduce innovative methods of teaching in their own classrooms. As Crookes implied, an educational change in an ESL classroom is triggered by a direct experience, research findings or an adaptation of pedagogic practices (Crookes et al. 1994). Teachers are eager to adopt methods of teaching they heard in methodological publications. In Polish context, Bestgen reported on how English language teachers modified their language practice after attending first methodological conference with international guests in 1957 (Bestgen, 1957). The teachers who were used to a grammar translation and audiolingual methods had the unique chance to participate in a number of workshops on various techniques such as songs and rhymes. Bestgen reported on changing their teaching practices.

It should be mentioned that although the innovations mentioned above are usually small scale, it did not mean they did not meet standards of implementation process. When TESOL research is taken into account, vast majority of reforms are initiated by native speakers of English. It means that a picture of a reform is culturally biased (Markee, 1997). Therefore, Markee suggested applying other models that aim to improve teachers and pupils experiences such as a problem-solving, participative, interactive and learning by doing approach (Markee, 1997). Since the Markee's report has been published Goh (1999) lamented on an absence of small scale initiatives which ignore centralized traditions and empower local stakeholders. I think therefore that the findings of this study may start a discussion on how teachers find a balance between a control and power that exist in their schools and autonomy and feel empowered in a classroom .

#### *5.2.4 Collaboration with other teachers – meso factors*

Collaboration with teachers is also considered as the important factor in construction of TEYL teachers' professional identity. For Marta, Emma, Krystyna and Agnieszka limited collaboration with teachers led to their feelings of disempowerment. They claimed that the atmosphere in their schools did not lead to the teachers collaboration. The reason for this is the stressful atmosphere in a school associated with assessment procedures.

Wiktoria's identity strengthened due to healthy collaborative culture where teachers were sharing materials, supported each- others in critical situations. It should be mentioned that healthy collaborative culture strengthened her identity as a TEYL teacher in Polish primary school. Initially she had certain worries associated with a placement in a lower primary school, however, her fears were alleviated when she noticed that she could count on teacher cooperation and head teacher support. It is argued in the literature that teachers construct their professional identity in the long process of participation and interaction with members of a given teachers community of practice (Castaneda, 2011). It is especially important for novice teacher to have good relationships with their community of teachers. The relationship with other teachers from the community helps teachers to define themselves as teachers ( Castaneda, 2011).



Having in mind that the first contact with teachers community is very important step in the building healthy collaborative culture in schools, I asked my participants about their relationships with their community of practice at the beginning of the school year (Wenger, 1998). For several teachers first contact with young learners' classroom, was associated with a high level of stress. Marta, Emma and Krystyna described the first contacts with their community as far from being easy.

For Marta and Krystyna the first days in young learners' classroom were not characterized by active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998, p. 173). The first few days at the new school should be slight adaptation to new rules that exist in a new community. However, for my participants this initial process was associated with tension and stress. Marta for example was told that no negotiation were conducted with her. Instead, she was appointed with a mentor teacher whose role would be to monitor her teaching.

Krystyna also assumed that her relationships with her new teaching community was stormy. She was informed several times that she cannot be treated as a legitimate participant, as her knowledge of methods of teaching are not up to date. The critical attitude of head teachers was followed by other teachers from her community. They did not want to listen to her arguments on choosing most appropriate methods of teaching, as they were afraid to criticize head teachers' opinions.

Difficult process of relationships in community of practice is evident in the literature. A study conducted by Gillings de Gonzalez (2009) shows that teachers who participated in the study were treated unfairly by the leaders of the University. The teachers complained that no one assisted them to assess their professional needs. Because they did not receive support in understanding school rules, they experienced tension in positioning themselves in their communities.

The findings of the study show that participation in communities of practice play fundamental role in positive or negative experiences. It is argued that teachers construct their professional identities in a long process of learning (Guzman,

2010). When during the learning process they experience tension, they may have problems with developing positive professional identity (Hayes, 2012). Hayes for example showed that conflicting relationships in the teachers' communities have impact on teachers motivation to work. Indeed Agnieszka who had enthusiastic attitude to the reform changed her attitude to planned innovation. She claimed that due to conflict in the community the implementation of innovation in young learners classroom would not be successful.

Having in mind tense relationships between teachers in young learners' classroom in Polish primary schools I assume that the changes should be implemented by creating opportunities for teachers to participate in professional development opportunities that is based on collaboration with teachers.

#### 5.2.5 The significance of supportive relationships (micro factors)

The supportive relationships with others can lead to experiences that are empowering. The data showed that each teacher largely benefited from support they received from colleagues, and family members and colleges. The support they received had positive impact on the development of teachers' professional identity and led to their feelings of empowerment.

Marta's story named three persons who had positive influence on her identity. A first person who positively influenced her identity was her aunt who supported her application to young learners' classroom. Her support had the following benefits. Firstly, her confidence raised when she finally found employment in public school which is associated with financial security. Secondly, although she knew she lacks knowledge in methods of teaching suitable for young learners, she did not want to disappoint her aunt and did every effort to expand her knowledge.

A second person who positively influenced her identity is a teacher from a secondary school to whom Marta referred to seek advice on using AFL in young learners' classroom. She felt confident when she remembered her teachers' words that using AFL should begin in lower primary school. A third person who had impact on the development of professional identity is Emma, a college from

school with who she developed collaboration. She helped her to develop confidence as an active agent in her classroom.

For Emma, her colleagues from CELTA group had positive impact on her professional identity. They provided assistance in the critical situations associated with the implementation of educational reform, thus her experience was less stressful. Krystyna claimed that her family was a source of support in a time of crisis when she lost employment as Russian language teacher. They encouraged her to change qualifications necessary for English language teachers and in this way to feel empowered. During her career as a Russian language teacher, she developed a strong identity which was threatened when she lost her position. In order to be positioned as a legitimate professional she needed to expand her qualifications. Agnieszka referred to the US teacher to seek inspiration for methods of teaching suitable for young learners. She claimed that by following her footsteps she would be regarded as and competent teacher. Wiktoria's identity was positively influenced by the members of her community of practice who were supportive in her first few months of implementation of reforms. Although she initially had few concerns about the implementation of AFL, her worries were soon alleviated by the school psychologist. Wiktoria unlike other teachers did not have to adopt her agency to find a balance between the assumptions of the educational reforms and her values and beliefs on teaching. She felt supported by the head teacher and her colleagues, she was also allowed to take autonomous decisions in her classroom. The findings of my studies align with those found in Hayes (2014) , Guzman (2010) and Gillings de Gonzalez (2009). These researchers assume that the micro factors (supportive relationships with others) are regarded as the most powerful component of teachers' professional identity which can lead either to teachers' feelings of empowerment or disempowerment. The Guzman's study reveals that relationships with others can have a direct power to influence teachers experiences in teaching, namely whether they are positive or negative.

#### 5.2.6 The role of the platform

The teacher's professional identity was influenced by the participation in the online platform for teachers professional identity. All teachers claimed that by

participation in the platform they managed to strengthen their identity as legitimate professionals. The teachers managed to develop certain strategies to feel empowered: expanding knowledge on methods of teaching suitable for young learners, developing critical skills, namely, to critically analyse different sources to develop their own materials that are adjusted to the needs of pupils and values and beliefs of teachers and developing collaboration between teachers in a given community of practice.

The analysis of the factors that shape teachers' professional - self show that its construction is not identical for all teachers. There are shared and individual aspects that influence the development of teachers' professional identity in a context of educational reform in a young learners' classroom and in teacher education.

Teachers' stories show that macro politics of the Ministry of Education negatively influenced the development of teachers' professional development. The negative influence of the macro context is present in their teaching careers, when they noticed that as graduates of private teacher training colleges or Russian philology, holders of CELTA diploma do not enjoy a great deal of prestige while seeking a job in public higher primary or primary schools and seeking CPD. The reason for this is lack of regulation that require head teachers to clearly display the procedures to hire new staff members, as well as shortage of CPD for TEYL teachers. It was evident from teachers' stories that the politics of the Ministry took a large toll on teachers. They claimed that although they invested a lot of time and energy to their studies, they experience setback when their qualifications were challenged.

What is more, as Johnson (2009) claimed teachers experience conflict between their beliefs and assumptions of educational reform. The teachers felt that they are pulled in different directions. They did not know whether they need to listen to the advice of the educational experts, or to follow their own beliefs and values about teaching. Stets (et al., 2003) claim that the relationship between the professional self and context in which teachers work is bidirectional, which means that they influence each – others. However, the stories of teachers show that the bidirectional relationships do not exist in the case of Polish educational re-

ality. The Ministry of Education as teachers' stories show does not want to listen to teachers' voices, instead the Ministry act as oppressive force that lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment.

The teachers share their focus on different strategies to feel empowered. The findings show they refer to teachers' role models from outside the school in a time when they cannot depend on relationships with their colleagues and CPD. As Hawthorn (2006) asserts the transformation of teachers' professional identity occur during contacts with various people. These contacts can be regarded as informal learning which influence teachers' professional identity.

Teachers refer to the teachers' role models who shaped their views on a professional career of TEYL teachers and what values and attitudes to teaching young learners they like to follow. The examples of teachers are regarded as important tool that leads to strengthening teachers' professional identity. Emma and Agnieszka referred to the examples of teachers who in their opinion share humanistic attitudes to pupils. They mentioned that examples of teachers are treated as a motivator to change the negative behaviour they acquired during studies and change their classrooms for better. In contrast, Wiktoria's negative experience with the attitudes of a teacher towards children encouraged her to change her teaching styles. The teachers' stories coincide with Johnston (2003) who noticed that teachers often refer to the role models to seek the values that are important for teaching, that is positive relationships with pupils based on trust and friendship.

The teachers also mentioned the influence of their role models to seek the confirmation that their methods of teaching are effective in young learners' classroom. Teachers refer to the examples of teachers who are able to direct their teaching practice and focus on support that is adjusted to teachers' needs.

Another reason for seeking role models is emotional support teachers needed in a time of implementation of educational reform. For most of the teachers from my study the professional careers were associated with negative emotions, therefore, they refer to their colleagues and family members for support. The relationship between teachers and their colleagues or family members lead to

the process of reflection when teachers try to understand their emotions which lead to strengthening of their professional identity.

The teachers differently experience the role of their initial experiences with teaching young learners on the development of their professional identity. Teachers' stories are full of sarcastic comments about the methods of teaching used in young learners' classroom which are not effective, lower financial stability and professional status of TEYL teachers. For Marta, Krystyna and Wiktoria these issues have detrimental effects on their professional identity. They were afraid that employment in lower primary classroom will mean lowering their professional status. Agnieszka and Emma also were aware of low professional status of TEYL teachers, however, they managed to successfully resist these negative factors. Emma for example had positive experiences while teaching young learners groups at private language schools which lead to the fact she had positive attitude towards teaching this age group. Agnieszka on the other hand developed positive attitude towards teaching young learners while observing young learners' classroom in the US. The methods she observed were suited to the pupils' needs and led to positive attitude towards teaching young learners. She strongly believed that by using the methods she learned in the US she would be able to transform young learners' classroom.

What is more, teachers differently see the impact of relationships with other teachers in a school on their professional identity. Interactions with other teachers contribute to strengthening or challenge their professional identity. Marta, Krystyna, Emma and Agnieszka had negative experience with interactions with other teachers from their community which are not characterized by trust. Such negative atmosphere enabled teachers to have positive experience in teaching. They claim that the lack of healthy collaborative culture in schools unveil the negative attitude of head teachers towards TEYL teachers. They claim that the head teachers do not act as coordinators who take into consideration teachers' opinions for example about the choice of the course books and methods of teaching.

It seems that the findings of the study can be related to the works of Holstein (et al., 2000) who claim that if relationships between teachers are not characterized

by trust, the teachers cannot develop motivation to teaching and feelings of empowerment. Wiktoria provided an interesting account of how her teachers' community is characterized by healthy collaboration. The head teacher promoted a wide discussions between teachers that value different opinions. In this way, the teachers feel empowered that their autonomy and well - being in a classroom is taken into consideration.

### **5. 3 Contribution to an understanding of teachers' professional self in the context of reform**

In the above sections I presented the following contextual macro, meso and micro factors that shape teachers' professional identity in the context of the educational reform in young learners' classroom: teachers' initial experiences with TEYL, the status of TEYL as a profession, the politics of the Ministry of Education, capacity for autonomy in schools, collaboration with others, supportive relationships, the role of platform. Some of the factors (like the status of TEYL as a profession and the politics of the Ministry of Education) lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment. The teachers invested lot of time and energy in their education, still they experienced disappointment when they noticed that their professional status is challenged (Palmer, 1998). However, some factors like for example : supportive relationships, the role of platform are regarded as a valuable empowering tool. Indeed, these factors act as agentive tools through which teachers can actively transform the reality in which they work and live and which disempower teachers.

In this section, I try to show that these macro, meso and micro factors work together in a different ways to create a complex picture of semi- specialists TEYL teachers professional selves in the context of the educational reform. The amalgam of these factors are different for each TEYL teacher. Each teacher has different experiences of macro and meso reality as a TEYL teacher which are more or less empowering/ disempowering. For example, teachers like Marta or Krystyna had definitely negative, experiences associated with teaching young learners. These negative experiences lead to a fact that they regarded their position as a TEYL teacher in public primary school as disempowering experience. They felt that being positioned as a TEYL teacher means lowering their professional status. These early negative experiences had major influence on how

teachers responded to educational reforms. Indeed as Day ( et al, 2007) observed, teachers' personal history influence a way they sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness (Day et al., 2007, p. 601) and consequently, their response to change (Beijaard et al, 2004).

However, teachers like Emma or Agnieszka have more positive experiences which lead to their feelings of empowerment. It is mainly to the role of positive relationships with others who they met as learners of English or ELT teachers (micro factors) their understanding of macro factors( their professional status as TEYL teacher, the impact of the politics of the Ministry of Education) is positive. Emma for example, claimed that positive relationships with her young learners of English as a second language encouraged her to take a position of TEYL teacher in public primary school. Agnieszka developed positive attitude towards teaching young learners during contacts with a primary school teacher in the US school. The above examples show that teachers' positive or negative professional selves are shaped by "interactions with others especially those who have a primary influence on their lives"(Hargreaves, 2010, p. 144).

It seems that the realization of teachers' experiences of disempowerment/ empowerment in the context of the educational reform in a young learners' classroom takes place at the meso level. The analysis of teachers' stories show that how they regard their capacity for autonomy in a young learners' classroom, their experiences with relationships with other teachers depends on the macro and micro factors. It can be assumed that a classroom(meso level) is a space where macro and micro factors meet.

Teachers' stories show that teachers' capacity of autonomy in a classroom and relationships in a given community of teachers are influenced both by their status as TEYL teacher in a given community(macro factors) and by their life histories (micro factors). Krystyna's story shows that her capacity of autonomy in a classroom is influenced mainly by her low status as semi- specialist teacher who did not graduate from a 3-year public teacher training college. The head teacher and consultants from teachers' professional development centres assume that her methods of teaching are not adjusted to pupils' needs. Indeed, as



Apple (1995) claimed: that a level of autonomy a teacher gains in a classroom largely depend on a position a teacher holds within their educational systems at a macro level (p. 45). At the same time, Krystyna claimed that by referring to her prior experiences as a Russian language teacher in primary and secondary school and ELT teacher in higher primary school, she managed to gain more autonomy in a classroom. She strongly believed that she is competent to decide what methods of teaching or teaching materials to use in her classroom. Day (2000) asserted that if a teacher decides to make autonomous decisions in a classroom despite adverse circumstances, it means that he/ she is committed to teaching, therefore as a sign of a good head teacher needs to allow for more autonomy.

Agnieszka's story is an example of how a right to make autonomous decisions in a classroom depends on her professional status. Although she graduated from private institution, she managed to gain rather high professional status in her teachers' community as her MA thesis was devoted to using creative methods of teaching in young learners' classroom. As her teacher's community is aware of her high professional skills, she was given permission to decide on a choice of teaching materials. Dondero (1997) links teachers' autonomy with their empowerment in a classroom. A teacher who like Agnieszka has an autonomy in a classroom he/ she has more confidence and a sense of ownership which leads to their feelings of empowerment.

Negative or positive teachers' relationships in their teachers' community also depend on their professional status as TEYL teachers, the politics of the Ministry of Education (macro factor) and their life histories (micro factors). Emma claimed that her voice in a school community is not heard because she lacks knowledge in teaching methods for young learners. A community of teachers where she belongs decided that she would be regarded as a competent teacher if she expands her theoretical knowledge. As Lave (et al., 1991) asserts that while being a member of a given community a teacher needs to accept all the norms and values of a community. In this case a teacher is required to have updated knowledge on methods of teaching for young learners. However, as a graduate of CELTA diploma she became a member of informal learning community whose role is to share materials and give each- others support. The par-

ticipation in this learning community leads to her feelings of empowerment. Nias (1989) claims that teachers develop emotional understanding of their professional and personal self if they “spend a lot of time talking to each other and, as such, reveal and share their attitudes, emotions, perceptions, values and beliefs (Nias ,1989).

From the above analysis, it seems that individual teachers’ experiences at the context of the educational reform in young learners’ classroom depend on the healthy collaboration with others from and within the school and reflexivity on the role of macro and micro factors. Both collaborative culture and reflexivity are catalysers of agency. According to Biesta (et al., 2006) the agency can be understood as the situation where individuals are able to exert control over and give directions to their course of their lives (p. 9). The teachers started to use their agency when they learned they feel disempowered. They referred to teachers; role models and support from their family to try to close a gap between the expectations of the Ministry and school community and their beliefs about teaching. The participation in the online platform, on the other hand, enables teachers to have positive relationships with their colleagues and be engaged in reflective processes, and in this way create opposite discourse to change the educational reality in young learners’ classroom.

Teachers argued that the online platform helped them to understand that positive relationships with teachers can be regarded as agentive forces that influence the professional self of TEYL teacher. The teachers who participate in the platform are engaged in various tasks which role is to develop dialogical exchanges with teachers of different values and opinions (Mangubhai, 2007). In this way, it is an valuable tool to resist power structures through creation of counter discourse. What is more, teachers claim that harmonious relationships with their colleagues enable teachers to develop the standards of teaching in TEYL and willingness to be a legitimate member of a school community (Hargreaves, 2009).

The teachers managed to build their agency through reflexivity processes. These can be regarded as a tool to transform teachers’ professional self (Schön, 1987). Through participation in various activities teachers arrived at un-

derstanding their teaching carers, what values are important for them, what are good points in their teaching and what need to be modified. They also were able to understand that their professional knowledge and skills can be useful in young learners' classroom and in this way develop their agentive capacities.

The participation in the online platform has the following advantages in strengthening their professional identity in a context of educational reforms in young learners' classroom. Firstly, the teachers are involved in reflection processes to understand the influence of the maso and micro factors that exist in the context where they work.

Secondly, the platform enabled teachers to exchange different values, ideas and emotions, and therefore be regarded as useful learning experience. The TESOL literature shows that the CPD for ELT teachers refers mainly to technical aspects of teaching (Mangubhai, 2007). The platform serves as an unique opportunity for teachers to have a space where they can discuss and challenge their values and beliefs about teaching.

Third, the teachers managed to challenge the present status quo and to negotiate their values and beliefs about teaching with the macro and meso factors.

## **5.4 Conclusions**

The chapter presented the findings of the research in light of the research questions and the literature on teacher professionalism and teachers' professional identity. The analysis of data revealed several contextual macro, meso and micro factors that influenced the professional self of semi specialists TEYL teachers in a context of the educational reform. These are: teachers' initial experiences with TEYL, the status of TEYL as a profession, the politics of the Ministry of Education, capacity for autonomy in a classroom, collaboration with others, supportive relationships , role of the online platform.

Some of these factors like the politics of the Ministry, teachers' initial experiences with TEYL or the status of TEYL as a profession are disempowering. These factors have negative impact on capacity for autonomy in a classroom and col-

laboration between teachers. On the other hand, the teachers listed several factors that were empowering like the supportive relationships with others and the role of platform.

Realization of empowerment/ disempowerment seems to be at the meso (school level). Teachers' capacity for autonomy and relationships with teachers in a teachers' community depend on macro/ micro factors. The teachers used their life histories, the supportive relationships with ELT teachers or family members as tools to manage to find a balance between the powerful contextual factors that exist in the context in which they work and live and their beliefs and values about teaching. The teachers also see the value of participation in the online platform for teachers' professional development on teachers' feelings of empowerment. Through involvement in different practical tasks the teachers managed to develop collaboration with teachers as well as reflexivity processes which act as agentive capacities. In the next concluding chapter, I will aim to reveal in more details factors that empower or disempower semi- specialists TEYL teachers at meso level and highlight the importance of finding different ways to create opportunities to empower these teachers at the level of teachers' community.

## **6 Implications, recommendations and conclusions**

### **6.1 Conclusions**

The purpose of the study is to examine the ways in which semi specialists TEYL teachers construct their professional sense of self (or professional identity) within the context of educational reform in Poland which has led to the lowering of the start age of English instruction the last to the first grade of primary school, as well as to the introduction of new child-friendly pedagogic practices. The thesis answers the following research questions: 1) What factors contribute to semi- specialists TEYL teachers' feelings of empowerment/ disempowerment in a context of educational reform in young learners' classroom, 2) What strategies do semi-specialist TEYL teachers use to feel empowered, 3) In what ways does participation in the online platform for teachers professional development help teachers to feel empowered?

The study was conducted in response to Johnston's (1997) call to conduct more research on ELT teachers' professional careers in a context of dynamic socio-political context in Poland which led to teachers' feelings of disempowerment. Johnston's research (1997) was conducted in a time when English language was introduced as a main foreign language in the secondary schools and the universities, however, only few percent of the graduates of English language philology wanted to seek employment in public schools. It was due to low professional and financial status of ELT teachers. The teachers from Johnston's study claimed the dominance of the powerful discourses that exist in a context in which they live which prevents them to use agency to feel empowered. Johnston appealed to the researchers to investigate how recent educational reforms impact teachers' professional identity, and whether the teachers manage to represent educational change as the "progression along their career path" (Johnston, 1997, p. 691).

Johnston claims that more research should be published to deepen understanding of professional careers of TEYL teachers in Polish schools whose voice is

rarely being heard and who are marginalized by the politics of the Ministry of Education.

Since Johnston's research was published, general ELT teacher professional status was raised. According to the research published by Eurostat (2012), all teachers being employed in higher primary and secondary schools have full MA qualifications which means they feel confident to teach at various levels. What is more, there is an increasing number of pupils who wish to take English language lessons in public secondary school or private language schools which increase the comfort of teaching. The group of ELT teachers who needs attention of researchers and the Ministry of Education are the semi specialists TEYL teachers who are marginalized by the politics of the Ministry as easy to enter and easy to go profession. The marginalization of TEYL teachers can be observed not only in countries where TEYL has a relatively short history like in Poland, but also in countries with long tradition of implementation of English language lessons to primary school curriculum (Garton et al., 2014). The results of transnational studies conducted for example by Emery (2012) and Rixon (2015) show that in many contexts due to a shortage of well qualified TEYL teachers who have not only high proficiency in English, but also thorough knowledge on methods of teaching for young learners, responsibility for TEYL is given to semi specialists teachers, which are those who either transferred from secondary schools and have good proficiency in English and knowledge in ELT instruction, or are not qualified ELT teachers (Enever, 2014). Semi- specialist teachers in European countries and beyond are marginalized by the recruitment practises in many countries who prefer to employ the graduates of formal pre- service and in- service training opportunities such as certificates offered by Trinity House, International House, or special online certified programme for TEYL by the British Council (Rich, 2018) and poor access to CPD provision for TEYL teachers. Thus, it is of urgent priority to identify the challenges faced by semi specialists TEYL teachers in order to ensure that the support is adjusted to their professional needs (Rich, 2018).

The narrative inquiry strategy adopted enabled me to foreground semi- specialists TEYL teachers accounts of their understanding their professional self in the context of the educational reform in young learners' classroom. Through this, I

identified the following macro, meso and micro factors that shape teachers' professional self: teachers' initial experiences with TEYL, the status of TEYL as a profession, the politics of the Ministry of Education, capacity for autonomy in schools, collaboration with others, supportive relationships and a role of the online platform. Some of the factors (like the status of TEYL as a profession and the politics of the Ministry of Education) lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment. The teachers invested lot of time and energy in their education, still they experienced disappointment when they noticed that their professional status is challenged (Palmer, 1998). However, some factors like for example : supportive relationships with other teachers and family members, and the participation in the platform are regarded as a valuable empowering tool. Indeed, these factors act as agentic tools (useful strategies) through which teachers can actively transform the reality in which they work and live, and which lead to their feelings of disempowerment.

## **6.2 Implications**

I assume, that the approach I have taken to exploring the construction of semi specialist TEYL teachers in the context of the educational reform can make a useful contribution to understanding construction of professional identity of TEYL teachers in the context of educational reform. The study contributes to better supporting TEYL teachers in Poland both in general and specifically with respect to semi specialists TEYL teachers.

The present thesis is positioned in post- structural understanding of teachers' professional identity construction, one which acknowledges the importance of taking into consideration the ways in which power and agency inform the process of identity construction. I draw upon positioning theory to describe the ways in which teachers construct their professional identity in the context of educational reforms, suggesting that professional identity construction and the reform process are linked in two ways. Firstly, at a time of educational change teachers professional identity construction process is informed (and potentially transformed) by the reform itself (whether positively or negatively). Secondly, professional identity construction on the part of teachers also exerts an influence on the reform and as such the ways in which teachers elect to position

themselves in relation to the reform and the coping strategies they adopt can work to further the reform or potentially derail it. Following on from this, drawing on a framework developed by Opfer ( et al., 2011) I identify a range of diverse factors informing teachers' professional identity construction that include macro level factors(wider discourses on professionalism), meso level factors (school and community factors), and, micro level factors (such as teachers' own dispositions and attitudes borne out of their prior experiences and life histories). Informed by Opfer's work ( et al.,2011), I identified the following factors : teachers' initial experiences with TEYL, the status of TEYL as a profession, the politics of the Ministry of Education, capacity for autonomy in schools and in a classroom, supportive relationships and the role of the online platform. These factors work in interplay in the construction of professional identity and in the creation of feelings of disempowerment/ empowerment mainly at the meso level(capacity for autonomy in a classroom and relationships with others in a teachers' community). I suggest that the realization of teachers' experiences of disempowerment/ empowerment in the context of the educational reform in a young learners' classroom takes place at the meso level. The analysis of teachers' stories show that how they regard their capacity for autonomy in a young learners' classroom, their experiences with relationships with other teachers depends on the macro and micro factors. It can be assumed that a classroom (meso level) is a space where macro and micro factors meet. I suggest that when there is a big gap between beliefs, practices, knowledge, and experience then they have problems with assimilation of new knowledge, and thereby with their engagement with the reform itself.

By showing what macro, meso and micro factors lead to teachers feelings of disempowerment/ empowerment and strategies teachers use to feel empowered I inform the Ministry of the need to take into account teachers' experiences. Only in this way they can create support that is adjusted to teachers' needs.

Although this research is small, it aims to offered important implications for growing body of research on practicing semi- specialists TEYL teachers. Firstly, by showing how macro and meso factors impact their professional identity I signal the contextual factors that have negative impact on their professional status, such issues connected with recruitment practices that prefer to employ



mainly the graduates of public 3- years teacher training college, the politics of the Ministry of Education who do not ensure that all graduates of teacher training colleges have access to initial training devoted to TEYL, lack of teachers' autonomy and collaboration with other teachers due to a fact that head teachers assume that teachers' prior knowledge and experiences are not of relevance to young learners' classroom. I assume, that my study will inspire researchers from other contexts to identify more challenges semi specialists TEYL face in order to adjust professional support for their needs.

Secondly, the research highlights an issue of agentic capacities of TEYL teachers. Teachers highlighted numerous factors that shape their professional self. These factors can have either positive or negative impact on their professional self. The agentic capacities enabled teachers to mediate different factors which shape their professional selves and lead to their feelings of empowerment. My thesis suggests that the teachers found the factors such as initial experience in teaching young learners, the politics of the Ministry of Education, collaboration with the teachers from a school as constraints in their teaching career, however, they managed to use their agentic capacities (referring to teachers' role models, support from colleagues,) to feel empowered. The findings of my study help researchers to get new insights to TEYL teacher professionalism. The teachers, according to my findings do not focus only on the challenges they face in their professional careers, but reflect on their practice to seek positive orientation to their practice. Indeed, as Johnston (2003) claims, reflection on teachers' individual practice may help teachers to reconcile his/ her identity of being professional the realities in his or her own context of teaching (Johnston, 2003).

Thirdly, the study has offered some insights into the value of the online platform for teachers professional development which is unique project that enables teachers to acquire knowledge of their selves as professionals. The platform enabled teachers to be engaged in continuous self - reflection when teachers learn what values are important for them and what kind of teachers they like to become. What is more, the platform enabled teachers to interact with each - others in safe environment. As (Overton, 2006) rightly claims , it is through interactions with others like minded colleagues teachers may feel that the experi-

ence of educational change is less threatening. I strongly believe that the findings of my research can inspire the Ministries to set up a similar project for TEYL teachers which aims to increase teachers' awareness of their professional selves in a context of educational reforms in a young learners' classroom. They are able to "sort their experiences, their anxieties, their fears, their excitements and learn how to use them in empowering ways" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 34).

### **6.3 Recommendations for the support of TEYL teachers**

The study offers the recommendations for the Ministry of Education to improve expertise of semi- specialist TEYL teachers. This can be done by establishing effective provision for TEYL teachers.

Drawing upon the teachers' accounts on the factors that lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment presented in a chapter 4, I identified a number of principles that lead to development of effective provision for TEYL teachers :

- 1) According to Burns ( et al., 2009), TEYL field should have well defined standards of professional qualifications. The teachers from my study mentioned that there is a disagreement over the level of proficiency needed for TEYL teachers and the quality of language qualifications set by private teacher training colleges. To resolve this dilemma, I suggest that a student teacher before graduation need to show C1 language proficiency. Such language proficiency is required by Cambridge Examination Syndicate that set certificates for English language teachers as a second language. In addition, to resolve disagreements over the standards of language testing I suggest that all student teachers from both public and private teacher training colleges receive support to expand their English proficiency and language awareness. My recommendations are in accordance with Wright (2010) who assumes that since majority of TEYL teachers are not the native speakers of English, there is a common practices for teacher's training institutes to include modules that help teachers to expand their English language proficiency as well as language awareness. Yet, the studies conducted by for example (Dagarin et al., 2007) on TEYL teachers' experiences with teacher training show that

teachers are disappointed with a content of modules devoted to language awareness which focus on general language improvement, and are not adjusted to TEYL teachers' needs.

- 2) The teachers were not given an opportunity to participate in a separate module for TEYL teachers. My thesis suggests that to ensure that TEYL teachers do not have lower status in comparison to general ELT teachers the Ministry of Education should make every effort to improve standards of teaching in teacher training colleges and postgraduate programs for TEYL teachers. Having in mind examples of good practice from Croatia (Dagarin, et al., 2007) the Ministry should establish more teacher training colleges for those students who know in advance that they will seek employment in lower primary schools. However, to give all students teachers a chance in the ELT job market the Ministry of Education should make sure that a curricula of every private and public teacher training college has a separate module for teaching young learners (aged 6-9). I suggest that the module for TEYL teachers should be developed in accordance with a framework established by Copland (et. al.,2014). It is suggested that "teachers need a strong understanding of children's social and cognitive development as well as a good understanding of theories of second language acquisition in order to teach effectively" (p. 225). The students teachers of both public and private teacher training colleges should have the same opportunity to have students' apprentices in public primary schools. What is more, as head teachers have dilemma over the standards of teaching in private teacher training colleges, the Ministry should assess the teaching and assessment procedures on the regular basis. Additionally, as Pawlak (2015 ) suggests there is a need for all student teachers from both public and private teacher training colleges to take an external exam that verify their theoretical and practical knowledge. The recommendations I set are in accordance with the literature on TEYL that recommend introduction of modules that provide teachers with key principles of child learning (Rich, 2018). However, the findings of Brining's study (2015) on the TEYL teachers' experiences with certified program show that little attention has been put on the development of methods, skills and techniques essential for TEYL teachers, as well as knowledge of principles of child development.

3) The teachers indicated the positive influence of participation in the online platform for teachers' professional development on the construction of their professional selves. There are the following values of the initiative:

- It helps teachers to reflect on their prior experiences and knowledge gained as learners and teachers.
- It enables teachers to interpret the challenges and successes.
- It enables teachers to show similarities and differences between their and others experiences.
- It enables teachers to expand their theoretical knowledge and effective teaching practice.
- It enables teachers to critically analyse different teaching materials and viewpoints. (Based on Malderez & Wedell, 2007)

It is recommended that more TEYL teachers in Europe and beyond are given a chance to participate in such initiative, which can be regarded as practicable forum where teachers are able to expand their practical knowledge, reflect on their practice and share their ideas, successes and challenges with other teachers (Wright, 2010)

#### **6.4 Recommendations for future studies**

Teachers' narratives are important vehicles for learning teachers' professional selves. Therefore, I assume that researchers who are investigating teacher identity need continue to use this methodology to develop a better understanding of who the TEYL teachers are, what values are important for them, what constraints are present in their context in which they work and live diminish their professional status as a TEYL teachers. Having in mind that a limitation of my study is inevitably the small size of the sample, I see the necessity to uncover the perspectives of semi- specialists TEYL teachers. It is because as En-ever( 2014) claims, these semi- specialists TEYL teachers are continuing to make a sizable proportion of TEYL workforce.

Perhaps more research should also be conducted to foster teachers' experiences in different forms of professional development that aimed to support

teachers. Indeed, as Rich (2018) claims English language training education for TEYL teachers became common practice in many contexts. Therefore it would be interesting to use teachers narratives to show how such initiatives impact their professional self .

## **6.5 Final reflections**

There are certain limitations of the study. The first limitation is associated with the choice of narrative methodology to guide my research process. Guzman (2010) claimed that the limitation of this methodology is honesty or dishonesty of the participants when they told the stories of their lives. I was aware of the fact that my participants could intentionally or unintentionally omit some information. One reason for dishonesty with the researcher is a fear that sometimes sensitive information could be given to other people. I ensured my participants that the information I received will not be shared with others, so I believed that the stories teachers told about their professional lives, their feelings and emotions were reliable.

The second limitation of the study is the researchers' subjectivity. As I have claimed in the introductory chapter, the interest in examining professional lives of TEYL teachers in Polish primary schools is moulded by my experience as the TEYL teacher. This background was present in the interactions with the teachers (Kvale, 2007). However, I should acknowledge that my background did not affect the analysis of data.

The research conducted in the thesis explored TEYL teacher' professional selves in a time of educational reform in young learners' classroom and in teacher education. The research identified the factors that shape teachers' professional identities. What is more, the research showed how supportive relationships and participation in the online platform for teachers' professional development helped teachers to find balance between the powerful discourses that are present in their professional lives and their values and beliefs about teaching.

As I conclude this project, I should claim that when I began my journey towards understanding of professional selves of TEYL teachers in the context of educational reform I believed that educational reform being introduced in Polish primary schools lead to period of uncertainty and instability for teachers causing them to re-evaluate what they know, value and believe with important consequences for their professional sense of self (Overton, 2006; Castaneda, 2011).

Now, when the journey ends, I am more aware of the contextual macro/ meso and micro factors that shaped their professional identities, some of which lead to teachers' feelings of disempowerment and some to the feelings of empowerment. The realization of empowerment or disempowerment takes place at classroom (meso level). It is here, the teachers use their agentic capacities to critically assess the influence of macro/ micro factors on their professional identity. When they assume that the politics of the Ministry of Education does not fit their prior experiences, they refer to teachers' role models and the online platform that help them to combat these powerful disempowering discourses and feel empowered. At the end of the journey I am also aware of the importance of the online platform of the teachers' professional development which enables TEYL teachers to use active learning and guided discovery techniques and tasks which seek to "disturb" teachers established ways of thinking and guide them towards new understandings and action points that can be refined by experimentation (Rich, 2018) and thus feel empowered.

I believe I would be able to use this information as a future teacher trainer who would be able to offer more support so teachers will feel valued as professionals and respected as members of their teachers' community.

Graduate School of Education

## Certificate of ethical research approval

### MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

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For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications> and view the School's Policy online.

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**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter).  
**DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

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**Your name:** Elzbieta Sowa

**Your student no:** 600052013

**Return address for this certificate:** Ulica Zagajnikowa 15/3, 05-500 Piaseczno, Poland

**Degree/Programme of Study:** Doctorate in TESOL (TESOL EdD)

**Project Supervisor(s):** dr Lindsay Hetherington  
(L.Hetherington@exeter.ac.uk), dr Sarah Rich(S.A.L.Rich@exeter.ac.uk)

**Your email address:** es330@exeter.ac.uk

**Tel:**

---

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

**Signed:.....Elzbieta**

**Sowa.....date:.....3.02.2014.....**

.....

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# Certificate of ethical research approval

## TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT:

Narrative inquiry of 6 English language teachers experience in a time of educational change

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### 1. Brief description of your research project:

The thesis reports on English primary school teachers' experience of educational change in lower grades of Polish primary schools. From the school year 2014/ 2015 all children aged 6 will be admitted into the first grade. In the school year 2013/ 2013 the parents have a choice whether to enrol their children to the first grade of primary school or to the kindergarten. It means that teachers have a difficult task adjusting their teaching methods to the needs. The educational change is met with resistance of English language teachers due to several constraints: lack of training in young learners methodology, lack of support from the headmaster and local professional development institutions, large number of children in a classroom.

In order to help English language teachers to adapt to a new work order the Ministry of National Education with the cooperation of the Main Centre of Teachers Professional Development designed professional development program which is a mixture of face to face and online learning whose aim is to provide teachers with essential knowledge, skills and support to better adapt to new work order.

By using professional identity lens this study aims to explore different strategies teachers use to deal effectively with educational change that is reading pedagogical books and articles, participation in one-day workshops, cooperation with other teachers from the local professional learning community. However, the main focus of the research is to explore if participation in new professional development program help the teachers to deal effectively with the educational change. I intend to reach this aim by the following research questions:



- 1) How do English language teachers in Polish primary schools experience the educational change.
  - 2) What different strategies do teachers explore to deal effectively with the educational change.
  - 3) Is participation in new professional development program which is a mixture of face to face and online learning help the teachers to deal effectively with educational change.
- 2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):**
- 6 English language teachers who agreed to participate in the study are employed in lower grades of Polish primary school.

**Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:**

**3. informed consent:** Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). **Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document.** a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents: **Each consent form MUST be personalised with your contact details.**

I asked my participants to fill the informed consent form. In this document I stated the aim of the study as well as methods of data collection. The participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary which means that they can withdraw from the project at any time. I will assure them that the data obtained during interviews will be treated in strict confidence and no identifying information will be passed to third parties.

**4. anonymity and confidentiality**

In order to assure anonymity and confidentiality of the teachers I will adopt the following procedures.

- 1) The data will be gathered and analysed only for the purpose of this research and not be shared with third parties.
- 2) I will ensure that the name of institution would be hard to identify.
- 3) I will make sure that the data will be anonymised through the use of pseudonyms.
- 4) The data will be stored in a secured place so third parties will not have access to them.

**5. Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:**

The semi- structured narrative interview will be chosen as the method of data collection. I will conduct one set of interview with each of the teachers. Each interview lasts about 1 hour. To ensure that the interviews do not cause unreasonable stress I will adopt the following procedure. The interviews will be arranged at the most suitable time for the teachers. The participants will be free to choose the place unless it is comfortable, peaceful and quiet. I will also inform my participants about the

length of interview so they would feel comfortable. What is more, I will ask participants whether they prefer their interviews to be conducted in English or Polish. All the interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed. Interviewees will have a chance to verify their statements at the stage of drafting the report from the interviews. What is more, I will present the participants with fragments of transcriptions that are relevant for the researcher.

**6. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, or**

I will keep all the interview recordings in password-protected files.

**7. special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.**

**8. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):**

As my participants will be expected to comment on their experiences with educational change and online educational platform there is a risk that teachers will be afraid of betrayal. I will try to assure them about strict confidentiality of the data.

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***This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.***

***N.B.*** You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

---

**This project has been approved for the period:**

**until:**

**By** (above mentioned supervisor's signature):  
.....**date:**.....

***N.B. To Supervisor:*** Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

---

**GSE unique approval reference:**.....

**Signed:**.....**date:**.....

.....  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

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## Appendix 2 Informed consent form

Dear...( name of participant)

I would like to invite you to take part in a project that is a part of my doctoral programme. The aim of the study is to explore English language experiences in educational change. What is more, the purpose of the study is to explore different strategies that teachers use to deal effectively with the educational change with an emphasis on participation in the new professional development program designed by the Ministry of National Education and the main Centre of Teachers' Professional Development in Warsaw. Your participation in the project will involve an interview which will last approximately one hour. However, it may happen that further interviews will be required to clarify certain issues.

Please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary, which means that you can withdraw from the project any time you want. I would like to assure you that your answers will be confidential and they will not be passed to third parties.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation

Elżbieta Sowa

E mail address: [es330@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:es330@exeter.ac.uk)

Contact to the project's supervisors:

Dr Lindsay Hetherington: [L.Hetherington@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:L.Hetherington@exeter.ac.uk)

Dr Sarah Rich: [S.A.Rich@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:S.A.Rich@exeter.ac.uk)

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the study undertaken by Mrs Elżbieta Sowa. I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore teachers experiences in educational reform as well as different strategies that teachers use to deal effectively with educational reform with the emphasis on participation in new professional development program designed by the Ministry

of National Education and the Main Centre of Teachers' Professional Development. I understand that (please tick appropriate answers

- 1) the aims of the study and method of data collection
- 2) my participation is completely voluntary

## Appendix 3 Informed consent form (Polish version)

### Formularz zgody na udział w projekcie naukowym

Szanowna Pani (imię i nazwisko uczestnika projektu)

Chciałabym zaprosić Panią do udziału w projekcie, który będzie przeprowadzony w ramach pracy doktorskiej. Celem pracy jest zbadanie jak nauczyciele postrzegają zmiany proponowane przez Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej oraz jak uczestnictwo w programie : Sieć współpracy i samokształcenia nauczycieli organizowanym przez Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji w Warszawie wpływa na dostosowanie nauczycieli do zmian proponowanych przez Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej. Jako uczestniczka projektu zostanie Pani poproszona o udział w godzinnej rozmowie. Być może będzie również Pani poproszona o dokładniejsze wyjaśnienie pewnych kwestii w późniejszej rozmowie.

Pani udział w projekcie jest dobrowolny i może Pani wycofać się z niego w każdej chwili nie podając przyczyny. Dane uzyskane od Pani będą całkowicie poufne i nie udostępniane osobom trzecim.

Dziękuję za współpracę

Elżbieta Sowa : [es330@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:es330@exeter.ac.uk)

Koordynatorzy projektu:

Dr Lindsay Hetherington: [L.Hetherington@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:L.Hetherington@exeter.ac.uk)

Dr Sarah Rich: [S.A.L.Rich@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:S.A.L.Rich@exeter.ac.uk)

Ja, \_\_\_\_\_, zgadzam się uczestniczyć w projekcie badawczym prowadzonym przez Elżbietę Sowa. Zapoznałam się z celem projektu, oraz z metodami gromadzenia danych. Rozumiem, że uczestnictwo w projekcie jest dobrowolne. Proszę zaznaczyć zdania z którymi się Pani zgadza

1. Znam cele projektu badawczego oraz metody gromadzenia danych
2. Rozumiem, że uczestnictwo w projekcie jest dobrowolne

## Appendix 4 Example of Initial Coding

### Participant 1 Marta

**Could you** please tell me how did you become an English language teachers for young learners?

I have always wanted to become an English language teacher since I was a teenager . I always knew how to explain difficult things to my friends. In secondary school I became a big fan of English language. You know I liked to learn new vocabulary and grammar and then share this knowledge with my pupils. **My teachers in secondary school told me several times that I would be ideal teacher.** Teaching was the job I wanted to take, ideally I wanted to work in secondary schools or at university. I thought it would be so easy to find a job in that field, so I wanted to slowly finish my studies and then look for a job. I just knew that the studies equipped me with good standards of teaching so finding my ideal job will be no problem. **I was convinced by my tutors from the private university that we are equipped with good knowledge of English which will be of help in any level.** Immediately after the studies I was offered a job in small private language school. **I taught a group of adults.** I wanted then to say thank you to my tutors from the university, what they provided me with solid instructions on how to construct my lessons to use different creative methods of teaching that eliminate boredom of pupils. **I knew that my learners were happy and they learned a lot.** However, to my deep disappointment the school was closed down and I had to look for another job. This one was in college where I taught intermediate students. The work was only every second weekend so I also had time for my private tutorials. I was quite satisfied with my job and the money I earned was satisfactory, but I needed steady job with health insurance.. I sent cv to many public school but without any effect.

#### **Why do you think your cvs were refused**

**I was told by several headmasters that they prefer to employ only graduates from Warsaw University who have high qualifications. In their opinion, I should look for a job in kids' classroom. However the funny things was that when at the second year of my studies I wanted to give a try and see how the teaching in young learners classroom looks like but I was told that all the vacancies for students were taken by public universities students. The Ministry she told me have**

required them to take the students from public universities as a result they do not have place for private universities. I consider it as non fair attitude”.

I was very depressed, that my employees do not notice the value of my education. However, my aunt who work in the educational institute that helps the headmasters to find teachers convinced the head master of primary school to employ me. I felt awkward as I realized that so many good cvs were rejected. I knew I had to do my best and not to disappoint my aunt.

**Please, could you tell me more about your first impression of working on young learners classroom?**

Well, I started teaching in September 2013. On 25<sup>th</sup> of August when I still was on vacation I received a phone call from the headmaster of the school that I received a position in school. I was really scared when I heard that my aunt helped me to get the job in lower primary classroom. I knew that I would have to play silly games, sing songs and make paper masks and puppets for theatrical plays. I am not convinced that these methods are useful for learning language. They are there mainly for amusement and fun. On one hand I was happy as I finally had a steady job, but on the other I knew that it was because of my aunt I had this job. The headmaster was very nice but told me that they had to reject almost 25 applications. I am sure that these people had better qualifications than I told thousands of times that the graduates of special English language teachers colleges in Warsaw University prepare fantastic and well prepared graduates who are ready to take job in kids' classroom. I also feared that as lower primary teacher it would not be possible to find job in private language schools or private tutorials. During conversation with my colleagues I knew that only graduates of secondary school have a chance of part- time jobs

I knew I had to do my best and not to disappoint my aunt. The problem was that actually I did not have time to prepare myself properly for my work. It was all my fault as my friend who is actually primary school teacher told me years ago to read something about young learners methodology but I did not do it as I thought I would find a job in secondary school. Now I really regret this decision. When I entered this school I had no idea about specificity of primary school.

**What do you mean?**

I have never wanted to teach at this level. I will always remember my English teacher from private language school when I started to learn English for the first

time in the first or second grade of primary school. I cannot recall that I learned something, maybe one or two songs. The teacher was actually very nice but I had an impression that her job was only to sing songs and discipline the children. I thought that only from the fourth grade of primary school start regular and real learning. You know that teachers have authority and teach something. I did not at that time realize that children learn differently than older learners. It is a pity that we did not learn anything about young learner teaching during studies. I cannot imagine that the people from the university did not know that young learners will one day become popular. I sometimes feel awkward that they did not at all prepare us to teach at this level.

### **Could you explain this?**

Well, during the studies we had one module for young learners. We did not learn how to construct lesson plans, syllabuses. Our task was to think about different methods of teaching for young learners. What we did we went to library borrow one or two teachers books and just copied different ideas. We did not care about it as my tutors told us that remembered that my lecturers said that young learners module is a waste of time for students of English philology. Teaching young learners is singing songs, playing games and having fun, and that is why main classroom teachers could be involved in teaching English in that age group. For graduates of English philology it means lowering its status.

### **It is very interesting, could you please tell me what did you think about the idea of lowering the age when children start learning English?**

Everything was so new to me anyway I had not contact with teaching kids before. I read hundreds of teaching materials to be well prepared but anyway I was kind of reassured that all the teachers even more experienced panicked. As the main teacher told me that in previous years every main classroom teacher received psychological diagnosis of every child that is admitted into a classroom. It was helpful for teachers as she knew in advance about strength and weaknesses of each child. Now in this information chaos the psychologists and kindergarten teachers did not prepare diagnosis. This mainly concerned 6 year old children. On the 2nd of September we had general meeting with all the early primary school teachers and the head master told us about the reform. And it was really a problem for everyone. I remember when I first entered a first grade classroom I realized that some older kids were very brave, ask questions, had no problems with writing letters and those younger were very quiet, one girl started to cry when I asked her about her name. What is more, I did not know how to plan a lesson for such a diverse group of children. I prepared a lesson plan at home. The aim of the lesson was to introduce colours and numbers. I realized that 18 out of 26 pupils knew all the colours and num-



bers, two of them even knew how to write. The lesson was a nightmare, when I asked the children to colour the picture according to the instruction given by other pupil, some of them were speaking Polish, others were asking for the names of objects on the picture. Then we listened to a story about one character's birthday party. There were children who said that the story is too trivial, others were saying that eating too many cupcakes is not healthy. There were also children who had problems with seeing the pictures on the blackboard clearly.

In your opinion, what were the reasons for failure of your first lesson?

I think that one of the reasons is that I did not know anything about each child so I can adjust teaching methods to the needs of each pupil. The other reason for failure of my lesson was the number of children in the classroom. Well I was born in baby boom period and when I started school there were almost 30 kids in school, but in those times children did not have behaviour problems. Other problem is caused by small and underequipped classrooms. In the news the Ministry informed the public that schools would be ready for 6 year old children. The schools she told would have carpet to play on, different toys like in kindergarten. But the reality is different, my classroom has a small space where the children can sit on the floor, however, when I want them to see pictures on the blackboard they have to sit at the desks, otherwise they would not see properly. The children seat in three rows. I would like to arrange the seats differently, but it is not enough space. The school is too poor to buy enough art equipment for children whose parents cannot afford it. Now I cannot plan any art activity as suggested by the Ministry as there would be kids who do not have materials. I do not know why the head teacher did not listen to advice of consultants from teachers assessment office and listen to teachers who know better what to buy. In my view . It would be far more better if we would buy more copies of graded readers for each child or more equipment for art and crafts activities.

**This is really interesting opinion, but could you tell me about your views on other element of educational change, that is assessment for learning?**

Oh dear, on the one hand I knew that learners of a language should be responsible for their own learning. I remember our tutors from the university told us we should encouraged our learners to plan learning process. It was really helpful for the pupils to be responsible for their own learning. The teachers assessment centres informed us that we should prepare children to assess their own learning. In my opinion still the course book does not encourage children and teachers to self assessment. The course books I use in a classroom use traditional approach to assessment. After each chapter pupils are tested and given marks. The question is how it is possible to introduce self assessment and then at the same time asked teachers to use course book which promote traditional assessment. The thing is you know that people from teachers assessment office knew that we use course book in a classroom and ask us to introduce self

assessment. In my opinion it will be better to wait till next year when probably they will adopt course book to requirements of AFL. The other problem is with parents you know.

### **What do you mean?**

I had this unpleasant talk with one parent. The child drew three stars under the statement: I can name the vocabulary from the page 2 in the pupils book. I explained the children that they should draw three stars when they can name all the colours and numbers. However, the parent came to me, very angry and told me that on page 2 there are also other objects that a child could not name. Well, I think that the parents were not accustomed to the reform and that is why problems arise. The people from teachers assessment office told us thousands of time to inform parents of expectations of new reform. But the head teacher did not bother to do this.

### **What did you think about introducing methods that strengthen learners' creativity?**

I believe that in modern world a pupil cannot learn only from one course book. I remembered how I brought different materials to the classroom. I did everything she could to inspire us to learn something new. However, You know, these books are so colourful, but the exercises and tasks seem to be similar. Therefore, the children are frustrated. However, a problem arises whether I should ask the children to fill the book or organize additional activities? I heard negative opinions from parents who spent lots of money on these books and complain that not all, the exercises were done. What is more, my classroom is not protected from the noise, and when I do a task that requires running I heard complaints from other teachers. I was completely confused whether I ought to allow children to make noise and disturb others or ask them to sit quietly at their desks?

### **Could you tell me what did you do deal effectively with the reform**

Well I did not want to disappoint my aunt and the head teacher who gave me a unique chance. You know at first I was scared when I took the offer from lower primary teacher. You know new methods of teaching, but later I found out how lucky I was for various reasons. Firstly, I got a steady job with health and social insurance. Secondly, I gained determination that although I did not have proper qualifications I would do my best and not disappoint my aunt and the head teacher.

I tried different things. I tried to recall firstly if I can refer to teachers examples that can be useful in young learners classroom. To my astonishment I felt bet-

ter when I realised that one of the teachers used AFL in her classroom. I remembered that she introduced this technique step by step. Now I remembered her words: Ideally such method should be introduced from the first grade of primary school. When the students are older they have problems with adjusting to new rules. I felt better when I remembered these words as I knew that this method is beneficial to pupils.

I tried to look for practical ideas in books for English language teachers. I found hundreds of them. However, these books are so expensive. I only bought few of them that helped me to enrich my lesson, for example 500 activities for young learners by Carol Read. However, most of these activities required lots of space and are not suitable for small classrooms. I also looked at several websites, like British Council website: Learning kids. But most of the activities require internet connection in the classroom or interactive whiteboard. I did not have neither of these tools. I also found lots of materials for copying, but the head master told us to limit on copying. However, I do not know how miserable my first days in school would look like without Emma's help. She provided me with useful assistance how to introduce different methods of teaching, how to deal with difficult behaviour of children. I learned that in a time of crises I can receive help from her but that my knowledge can also be beneficial. Emma also asked me for help in critical moments. We often met after school to discuss our dilemmas. She said to me I ask for your opinion as I believe that every opinion can give new and fresh insights to your problem. I became so proud that Emma experienced teacher valued my opinion.

### **Could you tell me if you were invited to any form of professional development?**

I did not even know that I could count on such help. The tutors from the studies did not tell us about such useful options. They said that books and teachers magazines are the best and most valuable tools for teachers. However, the thing is that they are so expensive to subscribe electronically or to buy. To purchase everything I need two my salaries. It is a pity that the Ministry equip the school libraries or teachers libraries with essential books. I think that it will be most helpful for teachers. I must say English language teachers are the most

harmed one in comparison to other teachers, as the English language books are much more expensive than other books that is why we should receive help.

**Could you tell me whether other teachers from your learning community help you to deal effectively with the change?**

What do you mean by learning community?

**I mean team of English language teachers who work together for their professional growth**

Thank You. In our school there are 6 early primary school teachers. Four of them has worked in the school from the eighties. They are employed as both main primary school teachers and English language teachers. Two other teachers included me have less qualifications. We have both graduated from English language philology and have teaching experience in secondary education. Therefore we keep together. The head teacher informed us at the beginning of the school year that we should learn and seek help from more experienced teachers who have knowledge about the reform. I was told thousands times by my head teacher that I got this job because of my aunt's backing and she had to reject almost 25 applications from public colleges and universities. These people in her opinion for sure had better qualifications. Having this in mind I was appointed with senior teachers whose role was officially to assist me in finding proper teaching method but in reality she was there to criticize every idea I had. I knew that my knowledge about young learners methods of teaching is limited so I needed someone to help me to expand knowledge. But I did not know that the head teacher gave me the worst teacher in school who thought that her role would be to help me with any problems that arises, but after five minutes talk in the school corridor convinced me how I was mistaken. She told me that my lesson would be observed every month and report would be sent to the head teacher. In the meantime I was invited to one of her lesson. She also told me she is too busy with her own work as primary school teacher and English language teacher and the best source of information is the teacher book. The mentor teacher told me that I do not have knowledge of young learners so she recommended me to strictly follow the lessons plans from the teachers' book and not to experiment with different methods I was very depressed after this talk I

did not know if I would manage this change. You know I think that I was given a worst teacher was done on purpose to humiliate me. Thankfully, Emma was there to help me. She has been working in this school for two years. She is not afraid of trying something new, she tries to experiment with different methods. Last year she took part in workshop organized by British Council on Assessment for Learning. She gave me her materials from the workshop. These were in my opinion too theoretical, so I asked her about any tips. She gave me useful advice how to assign a learning partner for child. Unfortunately, she is very busy person as she works in other private language school and take postgraduate course in psychology, maybe this is why she had no time to share practical knowledge with me. I have to tell that our relationship greatly improved after we joined the ORE program. We had to do different tasks together and then share our work with other teachers. Our work was appreciated several times.

**Did contacts with main primary school teachers help you in dealing with the change?**

Well, to tell you the truth during first few months it was a nightmare, as I had contact with the children two times a week for 45 minutes I needed information about children I teach. The teachers did not give me information about children about their development. I wanted to know if a child has problems with small motor skills because then I will be able to prepare cuts outs in advance and not require a child to use scissors. Additionally, I think that as English language teacher who work with children I have a right to know about any problems that child has at home, illnesses because this fact can affect the grade. However, I did not receive any information about children in September. They were always very busy drinking coffee, chatting with other teachers.

**Please tell me about your first impressions on participation in new professional development program?**

It was fantastic idea. I am so grateful that together with Emma we were invited to the pilot version of the program. Of course I was frightened at first. I was afraid that I would not manage to deal with so many different tasks: preparing lessons plans, preparing teaching materials and participating in the online platform for teachers professional development. Later however I realised that It is possibility to gain new methodological knowledge. I know so little about how to teach children so I really welcomed the possibility to do something about it.

**Please tell me whether the program helped you with adjusting your teaching methods to the needs of six and seven year old children**

Yes, I think so.. This educational film they presented was really great. In my opinion it has two major advantages for my practice. Firstly I managed to see major differences between 6 and 7 year old children. I did not know that attention span of 6 year old children is 5 minutes and 7 year old children is 10 minutes. Thanks to the teacher from the film I knew how to assess children's needs. Secondly, the film was a source of inspiration how to adjust teaching methods to the needs of both groups" " The advice from the experts were great and innovative, but I think that some of the ideas were not adjusted to the needs of pupils. For example, my pupils love musical activities but they are ashamed of singing in public. The experts suggested changing songs or chants to these which are more likely to arise interest of the pupils. However, my colleagues suggested very interesting activities which on the one hand are interesting for the children and on the other hand are designed for big classes. It was very helpful".

One group of teachers suggested to invite the children to participate in a program titled: " I am the best person in the world" The children were asked to prepare a short five minutes program: good mathematician- the pupil can name numbers to 100, good storyteller- the pupil can name fairy tale characters. The teachers told us that in this way every child can build self esteem. At first I was enthusiastic about the idea but then I realized that this task requires lots of additional work at home. I think that this would not be appreciated by parents. I also think that I mainly benefited from the cooperation with Emma. We work in the same institution we know our needs and our children needs. I think that the presence of other teachers is great, however, the program lasts only one year after this we probably lose our contacts. Besides , in emergency situation I ask Emma in school corridor and don't have to wait one day for answer. For example, one day I had very unpleasant talk with a parent who told me that I treat her child as 4 year old kid. She told me that she sent her kid to the first grade of primary school to learn something. She told me that her 6 year old kid knows how to count to 1000 in English. I was completely confused and only told her that in syllabus for 6 year olds children they are required to count to ten. I asked Emma for help what I should do in this situation, I needed the answer immediately.

**Please tell me whether the program helped you with adjusting to assessment for learning.**

To tell you the truth, I was from beginning sceptical about this element of change. I thought that in primary classroom it is a teacher role to assess the

pupils not the other way round. In a programme we were able to watch a fragment of a lesson conducted by very experienced teacher. The aim of this program was to show how to help pupils with assigning their learning partners. It seemed so easy when the children drew cards with written names of children. The children behaved properly and did not protest. I think they were used to this procedure which repeats several times during school year. This procedure is completely new to our children as it was introduced this semester. When I tried this activity to my children it was complete mess. It lasted almost half an hour. The children stood in line one by one they drew a card from a hat. When a child drew a card he or she had to invite a partner and sit together. Some children start to protest, some tried to convince me that they were not able to read a name. I thought I would never learn this procedure. But after video conference with consultant I now feel more confident. I just prepare a big paper with all learning partners. The children have no choice and do not protest. I also talk to the main classroom teacher and we together assign partners and change them after each month. It is so easy now. However, I still have problems with helping children with I can do statements, some of them still feel too confident and some are too shy and assess negatively.

**Please tell me whether the program helped you to design lessons that strengthen learners' creativity**

I learned new fantastic ideas to use in a classroom. In I liked a bank of projects that can be used in a classroom.. The project was titled : My own zoo. Children in groups of five, six organised a zoo, cut animals from magazines, drew cages. Six year old children coloured the animals and made visitors from clay. At the same time seven year old children labelled the animals. But at the same time I know I have to learn more. My learning partners from the programme suggested me to buy or borrow fantastic publication about using projects in kindergartens and primary school I think I would definitely read it and try to learn something new. Every time when I enter the learning platform I feel new energy coming to my brain. I cannot explain it , but these teachers have so much energy to seek knowledge , to brainstorm new ideas. I think this energy comes also to me and I try my best and also bring something new, excited and innovative to the classroom.

What are the strengths of the program?

Well. I feel now more confident, full of new ideas. Without knowledge on how to teach young kids I lacked confidence I felt like outsider who cannot benefited the school. I felt that thanks to the organizers I gained confidence that I am worth something"



I know now that I will certainly not disappoint my aunt and head teacher. I learned so many good can creative ideas. I also like the fact that I can always come back to the materials presented on the online platform and also browse through discussion forums. When I feel that I lack energy I always look at the platform and feel more powerful. . In this platform we had unique chance to learn reflection skills. I will give you an example : We have been told numerous times that children should make decorations for theatrical play as in this way they will be more motivated to learn. My experience shows the opposite. Even when I worked in private language school I learned never to ask my pupils to do art work at home, as I knew that 80% of pupils would not do it. On the other hand, for me, and parents doing cuts ups in a classroom is a waste of time. I proposed that instead of doing cuts ups, the children do painting projects on a large piece of paper. Together with my partner we proposed an activity which in our opinion is better for children.

**Did participation in the program improve your contacts with your local learning community and with main teacher?**

The coordinator asked us to share with the teachers from the school the knowledge we gained. However, in our school we are still treated as less experienced teachers. I think that they strongly believe and believed that they need to assess our lessons and not to learn from us. I think that in our school there is not a place where we share knowledge and I think that I as inexperienced teacher cannot change it. However, deep in my heart they noticed that I changed and learned new techniques. In December I organized a lesson for my mentor teacher. She did not praise the lesson but on the other hand she did not criticize it either. I felt so good after the lesson. Next lesson will be in May. I will do my best show my best techniques.

**Thank you very much for your assistance**

Coding

Fear of being employed in young learners' classroom

Poor channels of communication with the Ministry of Education

Poor channels of communication with the head teachers





Poor channels of communication with other teachers



Different strategies teachers use to feel empowered



The role of platform



## Appendix 5 Example of identification of emerging categories and sub-categories

Poor communication channels with the Ministry of Education	Sub categories
<p><b><i>I was told by several headmasters that they prefer to employ only graduates from Warsaw University who have high qualifications.</i></b> In their opinion, I should look for a job in kids' classroom. However the funny things was that when at the second year of my studies I wanted to give a try and see how the teaching in young learners classroom looks like but I was told that all the vacancies for students were taken by public universities students. The Ministry she told me have required them to take the students from public universities as a result they do not have place for private universities. I consider it as non fair attitude". <b>Marta</b></p> <p>think that every- one who live in this country heard about this reform. <b>There were constant debates among politicians and experts. However, the teachers were not informed about exact date of implementation.</b> In the spring before the reform we were bombarded with visits of parents who wanted to visit the school and check if the classrooms are ready for the reform. We could not function normally in such circumstances- <b>Emma</b></p> <p><b>The Ministry left everything in hands of teachers. As I told you I had to organize language training for Cambridge exam myself and I also had to organize professional training myself.</b> I regularly pay taxes in this country and now I am responsible for professional development. I tried many British Council, PASE, ORE, but thee organizations had one day workshops which were very expensive so I could not afford them. What really annoys me that for example IATEFL organizes annual conferences for English language teachers, - <b>Krystyna</b></p> <p><b>. I must say that especially young learners module was especially poorly designed. Tutor had no practical experience in teaching young kids, he only gave us facts about the design of syllabus and different techniques</b></p>	<p>Disagreement over the qualifications needed for young learners teachers</p> <p>Contradictory information on the implementation of the reform</p> <p>Lack of training for teachers</p> <p>Lack of training for teachers</p>

<p><b>such as games, songs, rhymes.</b> But it all was very theoretical because when I asked him about any practical tips he referred me to the books. Also what really annoyed me was the fact that the tutor praised all the tasks we created, he did not tell us what can be improved <b>Agnieszka</b></p>	
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